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ABSTRACT

These five issues provide news and support to parents who home school their children. Each issue contains news items and a substantial resource section which provides book evaluations, directory additions, resource lists, resource persons in the fields of law, psychology, and school districts, pen-pals, and advertisements. The February/March 1996 issue reports on support for mothers under stress, overcoming the fear of math, homeschooling abroad, alternatives to college, and questioning compulsory attendance. The April/May 1996 issue reports on exploring mathematics, homeschoolers as teachers, collaboration between kids and adults, how adults learn, and more support for stressed mothers. The June/July 1996 issue reports on finding teachers, reading, music, family meetings, mothers after homeschooling, and explaining homeschooling to others. The September/October 1996 issue reports on how kids handle homeschooling worries, art apprenticeships in puppetry and cartooning, writing clubs, homeschooling's effect on marriage, working with the school board, and teen gatherings. The November/December 1996 issue reports on why fathers may resist homeschooling, children's different learning styles, homeschooling in South Africa, involving children in work, and learning exchanges. (SD)

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Feb./Mar. '96

GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

Issue 109

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Patrick L. Farenga

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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PS 02225

Support for Mother Under Stress

Overcoming Fear of Math

FOCUS: Homeschooling Abroad

Alternatives to College

Questioning Compulsory Attendance

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Issue #109
Feb./Mar. '96

GWS

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by John Holt

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In this issue

We hear fairly regularly from homeschoolers in English-speaking countries other than the U.S. – Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand – but we hear only occasionally from homeschoolers in other parts of the world. Yet our Directory of Families lists people in such a range of locations that we decided to gather some of their stories together for this issue's Focus.

Some homeschoolers overseas are native to the country in which they're living, and others are Americans or people of other nationalities living abroad. Some aspects of homeschooling seem similar anywhere: the writers tell about reading aloud together, about the kids valuing the chance to have time for their own interests, and about others not always understanding. Sometimes the nature of the misunderstanding comes from the values or traditions of the particular culture, though, and it's interesting to see how homeschooling can act as a lens, showing, through people's criticisms of it, exactly what the people of a particular culture expect of education.

In some respects, the stories these parents tell may remind U.S. readers of what homeschooling felt like here ten or fifteen years ago. The letter from Spain, for example, describes a small movement, with people few and far between, and a gathering of 50 people is cause for great excitement. Yet these are native Spaniards, not simply American expatriates, so we can predict that the movement may truly grow in Spain in an organic way. In some of the other countries, writers describe a much greater isolation, with homeschooling magazines and their own beliefs chiefly responsible for keeping them going. This too was often the situation for U.S. homeschoolers years ago, and it's worth it for all of us to take a moment to think about the strength and courage of people who homeschool without the meetings, conferences, group activites, and phone networks that many of us now take for granted.

And for people who *are* getting a large portion of their sustenance from homeschooling publications, there's a lot to be gotten from this issue of GWS. I'm quite moved by the many responses to "Mother Under Stress" that arrived almost as soon as issue #108 arrived in readers' mailboxes. And there are several pieces in this issue that seem to be answering the question, "If we don't do the familiar and expected thing, then what exactly do we do?" Stories about doing math without using school materials, about helping young children explore reading and writing in creative and truly supportive ways, about what to do for high school "English" besides study grammar textbooks, and about what a young person can do during the late teenage years besides go to college, all give a concrete and believable sense of what we can do once we've decided to grow without schooling. — Susannah Sheffer

News & Reports

Homeschooling in the News

[SS:] Some recent media coverage of homeschooling has focused on specific aspects of the topic rather than just on homeschooling in general. One piece, in the 11/29/95 issue of *The New York Times*, written by Tamar Lewin and headlined "In Home Schooling, a New Type of Student," focused on the growing trend of older students choosing homeschooling and on cooperation between school districts and homeschoolers. It focused on 16-year-old Anna Coman-Hidy of Newburyport, Mass. and showed how she and her mother were able to begin homeschooling even though her mother works outside the home. It quoted from several cooperative school officials, and quoted me briefly describing how homeschooled adolescent girls don't fit the pattern described in other research about adolescent girls.

An article by Bill Zlatos in the 12/24/95 issue of the *The New York Times* looked at homeschoolers and high school athletics, focusing on Taylor Jenkins, a 15-year-old homeschooler who was recently allowed to play on the high school wrestling team (see our long story about this in GWS #105). The story says that access to school sports is permitted in California, Washington, Oregon, Utah, and Idaho and is pending in South Carolina and Arizona. Does this concur with what GWS readers have experienced?

Another way in which many people heard about homeschooling this fall was through an NPR series at the end of October. I didn't hear this series, but from what people tell me, it sounds as though it did a good job of conveying that homeschooling families form all sorts of groups and networks with one another. An opinion piece by Sandy Phippen in the 11/9/95 issue of the *Maine Times* responded to the NPR series and criticized homeschooling quite harshly, saying that homeschooling was "hermit-training" and asking, "What normal kid would want to stay home?" Zoë Blowen-Ledoux, a Maine homeschooling teenager, organized a letter-writing campaign by sending this column to several homeschoolers around the country and encouraging them to write in response. It's interesting to note that although Sandy Phippen might have felt himself to be addressing homeschooling parents, young people understandably took offense at the assumption that they were somehow being homeschooled against their will. The good news is that Zoë's example shows that young homeschoolers can speak out and be activists on their own behalf. Zoë reports that between 10 and 15 responses from both kids and parents were printed.

Finally, a researcher at the University of San Jose (Costa Rica) writes that she is writing her doctoral dissertation on homeschooling and the print media and would welcome any articles or editorials from newspapers or mainstream magazines that GWS readers are able to send her. Send to Isabel Lyman, 264 Harkness Rd. Amherst MA 01002; fax 413-256-4104.

Questioning Compulsory Attendance Law

From the 12/29/95 issue of The Christian Science Monitor.

In Colorado, a truant student's dream could come true next year. When the state legislature reconvenes next month, it will consider cutting loose truants and troublemakers who don't want to be in school by repealing all compulsory education laws.

Frustration with disruptive students is high in public schools nationwide. But Colorado is the first state to consider such a drastic way to deal with the problem of creating safe environments for learning.

"School is chosen as the first line of detention because it's there," says state Rep. Russell George (R) who initiated the bill. "But what is the cost of using the public school to hold these students? I think it's time to analyze the whole issue of compulsory education." ...

Critics call the idea of eliminating attendance requirements absurd. "The current laws on the books are not being enforced," says Janice Chmela, editor of the Journal for Truancy and Dropout Prevention. "If the laws were enforced you'd have less serious juvenile crime."

But Mr. George, the Colorado lawmaker, is not so sure. "The effect of enforcing truancy laws is that you make it harder for students who want to learn and teachers who want to teach," he says. Perhaps regular public schools would be better off without students who do not want to be there, he argues.

But the cost of eliminating school-attendance requirements could be high, Ms. Chmela warns. "It's a case of pay me now or pay me later," she says. "You're either going to spend the money to salvage the kids early or you're going to have to spend three times as much to house them in prisons."

Although he wrote the proposal, even [Rep.] George says he is not promoting a total abolition of school-attendance laws. Instead, he wants to spark discussion about the issue. "I don't want to ignore that this is a two-sided coin," he says. "We can't ignore what happens to the kids who are moved out of the public schools."

The legislator says he does not expect the bill to pass in its present form and would not even support it. In the end, he predicts only slight changes in the state's compulsory attendance laws. "If the majority of people who come to testify will admit that compulsory education is part of the problem, we might experiment with dropping the requirement down a year or two from 16 to 15." ...

Educators have long asked themselves why communities spend scarce public resources on students who don't want to be in school. "It gets to the whole issue of warehousing students," says Chris Pipho of the Education Commission of the States in

Denver. "Maybe if a student is not ready to learn, we ought to wait and put them in high school when they are ready for it."

An assistant principal in charge of attendance and discipline at Columbian High School in Tiffin, Ohio, William Wise, has had the same thought. "We definitely have a problem because we have kids who have no interest in school and are only here because the law says they have to be," he says. "They're not getting a whole lot out of it."

In a study he conducted at his school last year, Mr. Wise documented only a small correlation between attendance and grades. Time in the classroom doesn't necessarily lead to learning, he found.

That has been the contention of homeschoolers for years, says Scott Somerville, an attorney for the Home School Legal Defense Association. "Compulsory attendance is not the same as education," he says. "The fact that a child has to go to school does not mean that he has to learn anything." ...

[SS:] Some thoughts on this:

Homeschoolers usually want to distinguish themselves, both legally and philosophically, from truants, and there are good reasons for doing so. But there are also some good reasons to speak out here, to acknowledge some areas of overlap and to offer our experience and perspective. We've got some things to say that don't appear to have entered into the discussion at all.

Those quoted in this article recognize that it's not such a good idea to keep kids in school against their will. But they don't seem to recognize that these kids might have very good reasons for not wanting to be in school, that their leaving might constitute an important critique of the current system. How condescending it is to dismiss truants as not ready to learn, or to imply that the only place they'll end up as adults is in prison! Even among people who consider themselves dropouts rather than homeschoolers, there are plenty who left school because they wanted to learn more, or in other ways. I met a grown woman recently who described her decision to leave school as a teenager in just this way.

The assumption of this bill seems to be that loosening compulsory school requirements would affect only kids who are truants anyway, kids who were not doing well in school in the first place. But homeschoolers know that when teenagers who have been doing well in school realize that school isn't compulsory – in other words, that homeschooling is a viable option and doesn't simply mean getting tutored at home – they too decide to leave sometimes. I know that, legally, the homeschooling option doesn't mean "no compulsory schooling." Rather, it means "fulfilling that obligation in another way." But my point is that homeschooling, in all its broad, varied forms that we know exist, is offering something important to all sorts of teenagers for whom school isn't working. An important question for people who really are concerned about truants or dropouts is how to close the gap between their experience and the experience of homeschooled teenagers, how to help a truant feel that he or she has a way of making a meaningful and productive life outside of school just as the homeschooler does.

Our experience as homeschoolers and our familiarity with creative ways of thinking about young people's lives can help here. We can reach out to others in this way without jeopardizing our own situations (we don't have to say that homeschooling is the same as truancy; we can simply say that homeschoolers, by showing what's possible for teenagers outside of school, can contribute something useful to this discussion of what to do about truants). Who, after all, validates truants' instinctive dislike of school? I said in *A Sense of Self* that one thing that homeschooling teenagers have that dropouts may not is a welcoming community of people who confirm their feelings about school and offer real alternatives. Homeschooling teenagers are also much more likely to have their parents' support, but parents of truants might be able to be more supportive if they understood what options their kids truly had. School feels compulsory to most people not just because the law says it is but because we're led to believe that it's the only route to a viable life. Again, homeschoolers know that isn't true, and surely we can be innovative enough to think about what other options truants might have besides hanging out on the streets or beginning a life of crime.

What kinds of apprenticeships, group activities, real work, resource centers, does homeschooling help us to imagine? I think, for example, of Kathryn Ridiman's piece in GWS #97 about how valuable her work at the local stable was to her after she dropped out of school and how it gave her what neither school nor her family could. I think of Norma Young's piece in this issue about addressing her niece's unhappy school situation by welcoming her into their family's homeschooling life. I think of Alan Shaw's story in GWS #94 about high school dropouts learning how to repair their neighbors' appliances and to work with computers. I think of the youth centers and after-school programs that already exist, and I begin to imagine how they might be made viable during the daytime hours as well. We might not want to call all these ideas "working with dropouts"; we could instead call them "alternative programs" or "apprenticeship-based learning" or whatever name will allow people to think of them in a positive way. The point is to recognize that leaving school doesn't have to mean being cast into exile and that "salvaging kids early," as Janice Chmela urges us to do, doesn't have to mean only keeping them in school. What if even some of the energy that now goes into dropout and truancy prevention went into creating some of these other programs, ideas, centers, possibilities? This is the kind of discussion I'd love to see sparked by the Colorado bill.

Questioning Research and Assessment

From Pat Farenga:

Recently I was asked by some local homeschooling friends if Holt Associates/GWS would help with a study of homeschoolers in Massachusetts. I suggested that the researchers think about studying not test scores and

demographics (which is what researchers often study), but how homeschooled teenagers got into college or into the world of work without traditional credentials. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 1993, only 22% of the adult population 25 years of age and over had attended at least four years of college. So besides being useful to homeschoolers, I thought such a study would also be useful to the many Americans who do not have college degrees and might need some help in finding other paths.

The researchers said they would consider including this question in the study, but in addition to their questions about test scores and demographics, rather than as a substitute for those questions. As I thought about it, I found that I had some concerns about research that focuses primarily on test scores and demographics, and I said in my letter to the researchers:

> ... I have to let you know that while I try to keep up with the research, I'm no big fan of education research, especially that which focuses on reducing human beings and their achievements to test scores. Look at the results of 150 years of educational research: have the researchers helped schools improve or have they simply added to the mess? I view homeschooling as something essentially very different from both private and public schooling; indeed, I see it is as yet a third way to educate, and therefore see no reason to use school standards and tools for measurement for my family and our learning. The importance of homeschooling, to me, is that we are not like school and yet our kids get into college, get good jobs, are responsible citizens, etc. Since the 1960s, Holt Associates has been showing that schooling is not the same as education. We have a third way, a different way, that all people can use to educate children. Dressing homeschooling up as just another form of school diminishes our importance as a movement and makes us less independent from the official school system, because we are in effect saying to them, "See! Your test scores, attendance records, textbooks, and methods work at home as well as or better than they do in your schools. We can do just what you do in our homes."
>
> Instead, we can (and do) explain what we are doing to school officials without testing; we use school jargon when necessary to defend ourselves – a sort of verbal judo – but on the whole we talk about what we are actually doing and learning, not what someone else has decided we should be doing and learning. Our children are blazing a new path into responsible adulthood, not walking down the worn asphalt of traditional schooling into employment; therefore, let's not use the tired old standards and measurements of traditional schooling to present homeschooling to the public.

At roughly the same time, I was also asked by our friends at the National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest) to sign our organization's name in support of a document called "Principles and Indicators For Student Assessment Systems," which urged that there be new standards and procedures for evaluation of school students. Here is part of my reply:

> Thanks for keeping me posted on the progress of the "Principles and Indicators." The more I think about them, the more I find I can't get behind them. Everything in them indicates working *on* students rather than with them. For example, "Schools establish clear statements of desired learning for all students and help all students achieve them." If we are to truly change schools into places where students participate in meaningful ways, it seems to me we need to get beyond the factory model of mass education and figure out ways to personalize each child's school experiences by having *each student* establish clear statements of desired learning...
>
> ...I see some comments throughout the document about involving the students in the process, but nothing about making their personal standards and goals the impetus for assessments. Students can only participate in "discussing standards and planning... assessments."
>
> It seems that according to these

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principles, whatever experts, educators, and the community expect kids to learn is considered more important than what kids want to learn, and that diminishes any form of "self-directed learning." I can very easily see how these standards and assessments can dovetail with learning laundry lists such as E.D. Hirsch's; indeed, principle 2 creates a class of learning called "important learning," which I take to mean the learning dictated by experts like Hirsch. A child's interest in something that is not on the list, but which develops his or her intellectual faculties and critical abilities (such as studying baseball, to give an example), is clearly "unimportant learning" by this principle.

If the principles were based on a vision of individualizing education, rather than on a vision of a multitude of assessments to be used by educators to sort students by their achievements, I think I could have gotten behind them. Instead I feel the kids are being worked on again, more "Teach 'em and test 'em," than "Let's learn together." Indeed, in a "let's learn together" situation one doesn't know what the "outcome" should be since one is truly exploring previously unknown areas and, in fact, there may never be a final "outcome" since one discovery can lead to another in an endless fashion throughout one's life. I know schools won't tolerate such talk, and you need to maintain your legitimacy to remain a player on the national scene. But then you get these assessments ... which, to me, just rearrange the deck chairs on the S.S. Titanic School, since they primarily serve the experts and not the children. There are many, many good schools, home schools, and teachers that don't use any sorts of assessments other than their own two eyes, their interactions with children, and their knowledge of how other children have learned; that is a radical view, I know, but that's why it is different and useful. The "do an activity and take a performance assessment" model that you offer here is, to me, just an update of the old "read a book and take a test" model. It's a slight improvement, I'll grant you, but I do think we should be shooting much higher with our goals for education than merely grading children according to arbitrary score cards of knowledge determined by "the broad community." How about nurturing children who don't need to be forced to learn, forced to take tests? Children who can do self-assessments? Can we work with the intrinsic motivation to learn that all of us are born with, or must we kill it and replace it with the attitude, "I never would have learned anything unless I was forced to learn it," which these assessment systems posit.

I'm sorry to be so negative, but I feel we can be honest with one another. I work in a field where parents, often without any teaching degrees, expert panels, or large-scale assessments, are able to help their children learn and get into college or find work worth doing. Even if just one family did it, it would prove there is another way to help children learn than "teach them and assess them." However, thousands of families are doing it, and I want to put my energy into creating something different from school for our children, not just into making the existing system a little more friendly.

Office News

[88:] I'm writing this in the middle of one of the many blizzards that have fallen on the northeast so far this winter. Our staff has capably handled the flow of work during our busy holiday rush season (thanks to our customers for making it a busy one!) *and* during one snowstorm after another.

Pat Farenga will be heading for warmer climates at the end of January to speak at the Florida Education Paperback Association conference and then to do a workshop for homeschoolers on Learning Without a Curriculum. By the time you receive this issue, I'll have spoken at a library in Southampton, New York about what other educators can learn from the homeschool movement. We're just about ready to go to press with a new brochure that lists our lecture and workshop topics; ask for a copy if you're involved in planning a conference or other event in your area or if you have any contacts at radio stations who might be interested in interviewing us. This is a good and easy (because it doesn't involve travel) way for us to spread the word about homeschooling, and it can be done in conjunction with any local news or events that homeschoolers in your area would like to publicize.

Several groups have organized book fairs with our materials, and we encourage others to do the same. Book fairs allow you to raise money for your own group while making our books available to local people at discounted prices. Ask for our brochure about how to hold a book fair in your area.

We're also working on a general flier that gives an overview of our activities here. It's useful for a small event such as a support group meeting or a library gathering. If you can make good use of such fliers, please contact us six weeks prior to the event.

Calendar

Mar. 22-23, 1996: "Helping Homeschoolers Do it Themselves" conference sponsored by N. Illinois University. Workshops for adults and children. For info: 815-753-0421.

Mar. 30: Maryland Home Education Conference in Takoma Park. Pat Farenga speaking; materials from John Holt's Bookstore available. For info: Manfred Smith, 410-730-0073.

Apr. 6: Seminar with Richard and Penny Barker sponsored by Home Education Resource Organization in Norwalk, OH. For info: 419-668-1706.

Apr. 28: California Home-Education conference in Anaheim, CA. Pat Farenga speaking; materials from John Holt's Bookstore available. For info: Barbara David, 916-391-4942.

May 3-4: Wisconsin Parents Assoc. 13th annual conference on home education at the Univ. Ctr of UW-Stevens Pt. For info: WPA, PO Box 2502, Madison WI 53701; Melissa Rice, 715-341-6378.

May 10-11: B.E.A.C.H. Tidewater VA Homeschool Curriculum and Book Fair at VA Beach Book Pavilion. For info: 804-474-0389.

We are happy to print announcements of major homeschooling events, but we need plenty of notice. Deadline for GWS #110 (events in May or later) is 3/10. Deadline for GWS #111 (events in July or later) is 5/10. ◆

Creative Ideas for Helping Young Children

Even when kids are following their own inerests, there's still room for a parent's ingenuity and resourcefulness. Here are three ideas for helping kids who are new to reading and writing.

Helping a Non-Reader Play a Board Game

From Marion Webster (MA):

I really liked the game Clue when I was young, so when I saw it at a yard sale recently for a dollar, I bought it. When I sat down with my 5-year-old son (who loves detective intrigue) to play the game, though, I realized that the players have to be able to read, and my son doesn't read yet.

There must be a way for a non-reader to play the game, I thought to myself. I came up with the idea of a Detective Notebook – I made a chart that identified all the clues by color, picture, or first letter (my son knows letters, but not whole words). I explained to him how he could check off the clues in his "notebook" by matching them by color, picture, or first letter to the cards and the board.

It works just fine. We play as a family, and he plays that way with both his reading and his non-reading friends.

"Writing Machine" Helps with Cursive

From Aleta Karstad (Ont):

We were pleased to read Lee Criscuolo's letter in GWS #107 about 8-year-old Kelly's reticence to write. I read it to our 9-year-old child Jennie, who has never been to school, and she was encouraged to hear such an understanding account of a child who is frustrated about writing in just the same way that she has been herself.

She shows (or has shown) more resentment toward the subject of writing than our occasional encouragement would warrant, and I think the negative feelings come mostly from her frustrated desire to write smoothly and rapidly, so that she can effortlessly write in a journal and tell all the stories she has in her head.

Inspired by Lee's letter, Jennie returned today to a story she began a couple of months ago and added a couple of sentences, with some spelling help from me as I chopped vegetables and with some words from her picture dictionary – a long list of items offered by a pedlar in a castle. When the vegetables were in the pot, I then had time for what we call the "Writing Machine."

I'll explain. I have looked forward for a long time to having Jennie learn to enjoy the smooth flow of a cursive hand and the pleasure of writing her thoughts freely. That's why I've invented the Writing Machine, and we're so excited about it that we have to tell GWS about it even before its usefulness has been proven in time.

Jennie simply sits sideways on my lap, facing our right hands, and, on a page on a small board slanted against the table edge, we write whatever she wants, with her hand holding the pen, relaxed inside my hand, which holds her fingers gently and guides the pen. My left hand, from round her back, supports the tilt of the board. The page is horizontal and the writing is large – line space about a half inch.

Today we wrote what I'd jotted down of her earlier enthusiasm for the Writing Machine. She wrote, "If somebody asks me what I like, I'd say I like to cuddle, and write – and when we put them together, we get the 'Writing Machine.' It's such a nice rhythm, and it's amazing to see that beautiful writing coming from my very own fingertips. You should try it!"

So, we enjoy cursive writing together, she gets her words down, she gets her cuddle, and time will tell!

Organizing Books

From Carol Sakala (MA):

The way we organize our books at home has helped to foster 6-year-old Leah's interest in reading and allows her to use books as tools for her own purposes. We use various library conventions. Books are sorted by topic, with different shelves for biography, animals, history, folk and fairy tales, and so forth. Each non-fiction shelf is again sorted topically; for example, general animal books are followed by books about prehistoric animals, mammals, birds, etc. The fiction shelves are sorted roughly by size and shape, so that smaller and slimmer books don't get lost among larger ones. We have a reshelving cart and, until Leah is a bit older, I will continue to do the job of putting books back. We also have what amounts to a "new acquisitions" area; a book only gets put in its space on the shelves after the children have gained some familiarity with it. Although the specific books have fairly specific locations, we do not need to use labels, numbers, or similar organizing devices. With this system, Leah can seek out a specific book that she wants and she can pursue her own interests and questions when they arise, often entirely on her own.

Finally, like many librarians, I often pull and leave out books relating to the current season or timely events – books about Christmas, Chanukah, and Kwanzaa in December, books on marine life and culture at the time of our coastal vacations and books on Southwest themes in connection with visits to Arizona grandparents. Our children tend to take special interest in these books.

Books are also important to our younger child, Jonah (3). Because he is too young to have a good grasp of the topical shelf system and is usually more interested in books written for younger children, for now we keep the books that are more appealing to him in a separate bookcase, all roughly sorted by size to help him find what he might be looking for.

This system works well for all of us. I only wish that the rest of our lives would be so well ordered! ◆

Overcoming Fear of Math

Test Discourages Her

Lyn Milam (FL) writes:

My daughter Arwen has been homeschooled since fourth grade and is now in tenth. Her interests have mostly been nature, writing, music, art, reading, and playing. Recently two of her homeschooled friends took standardized tests, and one of them scored in the 98th percentile. Arwen wanted to take the test too, and since she had just started tenth grade, I ordered the ninth grade test. The Language Arts section was very comfortable for her, but the Math, Science, and Social Studies sections not only intimidated her but made her feel very inadequate and dumb. I don't think testing itself was daunting to her, because she did well on the Language Arts section.

Before she left school she was an A or B student and she was very proud of her grades. We did Saxon math at home in fifth through seventh grade, and she did very well, saying that most of the problems were repetitive and boring. She focused on the problems with which she felt rusty. Then suddenly, when she was in seventh grade, nothing in math made sense to her anymore. Basic functions retreated into the back of her mind. Word problems were impossible to decipher. I told her to put math aside for eighth grade, frequently citing the part of the book *Free At Last* that said Sudbury Valley School's average self-directed students learned everything they needed to do well on SAT tests in about six months. I encouraged her to follow her interests and not to worry about math. Last year, she wanted to start learning math again, and I bought the Key Curriculum workbook sets. She was mildly bored with the fractions, decimals, and percents, but really enjoyed the geometry, saying she wanted more.

Since taking the test, she feels very badly about her abilities. I tell her that new skills and knowledge are *acquired*, not in-born, and that if it is important to *her* to test well, she could look into interesting ways to challenge herself in practicing math skills as puzzles to solve and interesting ways of working with science facts and social studies ideas. I'm not sure she buys this, though, since her friend with the high test score had only followed her own interests and had worked only sporadically with math workbooks. She doesn't really want to give up her writing, art, and music time in order to force herself into subjects that aren't as interesting to her, but her self-esteem is lowered when she compares herself to others who do better in those areas.

I think the main problem with most math programs is that they are on paper and have too many number problems and not enough real-life word problems where the reader has to determine exactly what to do with the numbers. Are there any programs that involve realistic word problems and games that involve using mathematical thinking? Are there books that make math meaningful and interesting for older teens? Most important to me is that she recover her self-esteem and develop a fearless attitude, knowing she can accomplish anything she sets her heart and mind and time to doing.

See Aaron Falbel's story, "Unschooling Math with Teenagers," in GWS #107, for many good suggestions of games and books to try. Several of the math books in our catalog fit the description of what you're looking for, too. The following story from Joanna Hoyt tells of another homeschooler's overcoming her negative attitude about math, and we'll welcome other thoughts for our next issue.

Seeing Math in a New Way

Joanna Hoyt (ME) writes:

From a very early age I was interested in everything. I wanted to know why this and why that, wanted to understand and to know about all the different answers to my questions. I had many questions about math – about numbers, about patterns, about shapes and their names. I remember proudly learning "trapezoid" and "pentagon." I learned addition and subtraction on my own before I would have been considered "school age," with the help of Cuisenaire rods and sometimes explanations from my mother. With the rods, I could see easily not only that 2 plus 2 was 4 but *why* it was 4. I also learned the basic principles of multiplication with the rods – it was clear that three red rods were as long as one black rod, or two purples made a brown.

The problem came when I was 8 and my mother remembered that she had been 8 years old when she, in school, learned the times tables. I was ahead in other subjects, and had learned some math early, but I did not want to learn times tables. Poems or things that interested me I could memorize easily. I was not interested in learning lists of equations. There was only one right answer, and they were rather dull anyway. I did not learn my times tables well. I also decided that I hated math. I was still interested in shapes and patterns, and I delighted in logic puzzles, but I did not think of these as Math.

Fortunately, before this could go on for long, my mother, already worried about my stubborn refusal to learn multiplication, went to a conference and came back rather relieved. I'm not sure what she had been told, but we dropped times tables and she taught me how to break down a number into its prime factors. That looked interesting to me. There was still only one right answer, but it took some thought and it did not have to be memorized. It was like a puzzle.

Having mastered prime factors, I proceeded on to long division. I had a book, a large gray arithmetic book, that my mother wanted me to finish. Long division again was boring – the multiplying, subtracting, dividing over and over was tedious, and I was not interested. I kept doing problems over and over because I was getting them wrong. After what felt like ages of this, I was convinced that my brain was

incapable of doing math.

My mother was alarmed and concerned over this, and one day she sat down with me to talk about it. I was mad – I said I couldn't do it and I hated it, trying not to cry. She saw that I was almost crying. I don't remember exactly what she said, but soon she had me writing out what I was saying to myself about math. This idea came from Transactional Analysis, which my mother had introduced me to quite early on. TA uses a three-part model of each person: a Parent that contains shoulds, oughts, and how-tos, a Child that contains emotions, imagination, fantasies and wishes, and an objective Adult that contains information about the world outside and inside yourself. My dialogue about math was between an angry Parent and a whimpering Child. It began with the angry Parent accusation: "You're supposed to be smart, and you can't do basic math! What are you, stupid? Why don't you just shape up and do it right!" And the Child wailed back, "I can't do it – it's too hard – it's boring anyway – it isn't my fault!" Several rounds of this came out on the paper. I was shocked – I hadn't stopped to listen to what I was saying to myself. I added a last piece onto the dialogue, spoken by the Adult, reassuring me that I could do math; it was just harder for me than some other things were, and it wasn't my favorite subject. That was OK. I kept the paper in the back of my arithmetic book and looked at it when I was discouraged.

I finally finished long division and worked through decimals, which weren't very interesting as the textbook presented them, but were OK. In the back of the book was a little bit of very basic algebra. I was interested once again. Variables! Unknowns! It sounded interesting to me, and at first it was. But as the weeks wore on it began to seem less and less so. It seemed repetitive and dull again, but I kept telling myself, truthfully, "It's better than arithmetic." I scored poorly on the tests, though, because there were too many problems and I got careless with them. Math was OK now, but still not really fun. Algebra dragged on and on.

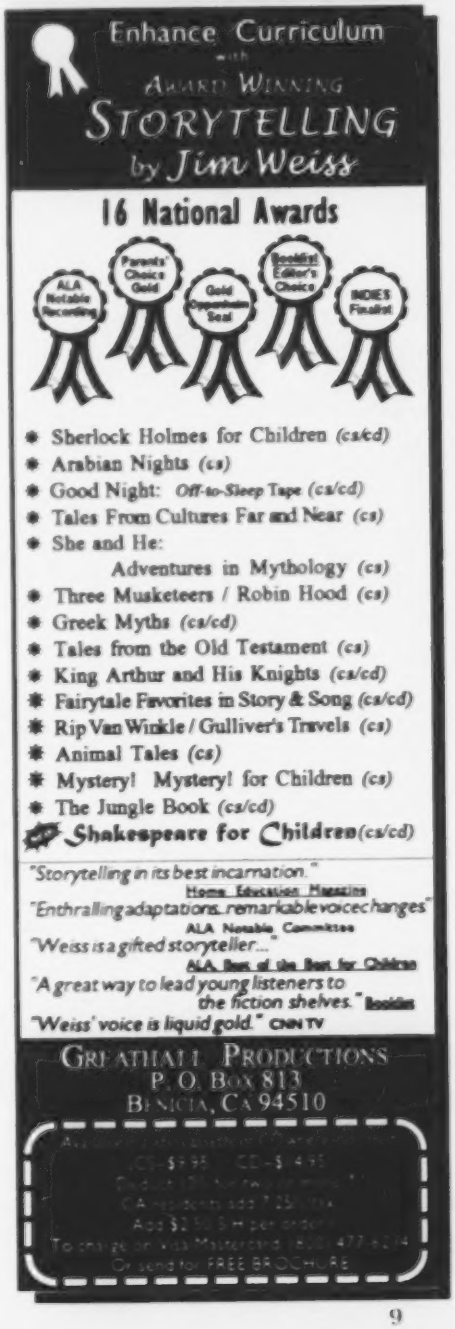
The January after I started algebra, my family went down to a conference in New York. There were various workshops on writing, science, dance, art, and math. My mother encouraged me to try the math workshop, and I agreed. Algebra had given me a little more interest in math, and I thought the workshop might be worth a try. I was nervous, though; the conference was meant to be for gifted children and their parents, and I was afraid that I would arrive there and seem really dumb.

The math in the workshop was like nothing I had been exposed to before. The workshop leader, a graduate student who had switched his undergraduate major from English to math, talked about math that had more than one answer. He explained that mathematicians still disagreed on whether the set of whole numbers was twice as large as the set of odd numbers (since only every other whole number is odd), or the same size (since both sets are infinite). All of us took sides and argued about it. I could understand it, and it was enjoyable – even fascinating! He introduced me to Euhler's law, which says that for any 3-dimensional shape made with straight lines, the number of its vertices (places where lines meet) added to the number of its faces (sides) was always 2 more than the number of lines in the shape. I constructed a shape that I said didn't fit the law. (It did fit, but only if you accepted the rule that faces could not have holes in them.) I thought this fascinating, and spent the lunch hour with him counting up the lines and faces on a stemmed dessert dish.

When we went back home, I kept up a correspondence with this workshop leader, and we are still in touch. I have since read some Euclid, and am playing with tilings – shapes with which one could solidly cover a flat plane without wasting space between edges. (They don't have to come out square at the edges – triangles and hexagons, for example, are acceptable, but circles aren't, since they cannot share edges with one another. And then there are patterns of many shapes.)

Now I am about to start calculus with the graduate student's help. Higher math is FUN. And I've even learned some interesting paradoxes in arithmetic! I am beginning to see now how math is used in art (not just the angles and shapes of the actual picture, but lines of motion and compositional areas), in nature (leaves, dogs, sea urchins all have symmetry of one kind or another; leaves alternate or spiral up around branches), and in music (two, three, or four beats in a measure; actual notes are various fractions of the beats), and some kinds of poetry (meter and rhythm and length).

My brain is capable of doing math. And it enjoys math, too. ◆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Homeschooling Twins

Anne-Marie Gorman of Massachusetts writes:

My two older children are twins who are nearly 4, and already I can see that there may be problems ahead. Teresa has begun to read on her own a little bit, and Sophie senses that this is something desirable that she can't do. She sulks and says, "I can't," and runs away. (These are situations she creates herself; my husband and I try hard not to push her at all to read.)

Teresa, on the other hand, is happy to play number games and to keep getting stuck or getting wrong answers; she couldn't care less that Sophie gets most of them right. I would like to hear from GWS readers who have experience homeschooling twins or being a homeschooling twin, especially when one twin seems less resilient.

We asked other homeschoolers with twins to respond:

From Gloria Harrison (PA):

I remember that at every phase of development, each of my twins would attain a new level and then rest there, so to speak, as if she were waiting for the other one to catch up. For example, Anna learned to crawl first, but she learned no new accomplishments, such as walking or feeding herself, until Sophia was crawling too. Then, once they were both crawling, it might be Sophia who would progress to the next step and then wait for Anna. This happened with sleeping patterns, eating patterns, reading and writing, etc. So after a while, I stopped worrying that one of them might be "ahead" of the other.

My twins are fraternal, but until two years ago, they looked absolutely identical and were more like two halves of one unit, however hard I tried to encourage their individuality. But just in this last year or so, I have seen a different pattern emerging. They both love to write, but it is Anna who writes the most imaginative stories. They both love to be in plays, but it is Anna who is chosen for the leading part. They both took part in the National Geography Bee, but it was Anna who was one of the finalists. Anna is definitely becoming an extrovert, is willing to work harder, does not give up as easily, makes friends more quickly. Sophia is becoming quieter, more clingy to me. I too am concerned about this difference in them, but I remind myself that they are individuals and I rejoice that finally their different temperaments are beginning to emerge. I also believe that I must work very hard at encouraging and praising Sophia for what she does do well. I am trying to find time alone with each of them, but it is difficult, and when they were toddlers it was absolutely impossible.

I remember, though, that when sometimes one of them would wake up in the middle of the night, I would welcome this opportunity to give her some individual attention. Being careful not to wake the other one, we would bring the wakeful twin into our bed, play with her, fuss over her, and then put her back to bed. We would never have dreamed of doing this with our two older children. They would never have gone back to bed willingly. But incredibly, each of the twins seemed to sense that this individual time was precious. They never made a fuss when being put back to bed, and it never developed into a nightly situation, which we would have resented.

It sounds like Anne-Marie's Sophie is a perfectionist. When she sees her-self as "failing" in reading, she runs away from the situation. My Sophia, at age 11, retreats by becoming quiet and sulky. She won't come straight out and admit that he thinks she's "not as good" as Anna. I try to defuse the situ-ation by correcting their schoolwork with each one individually. They used to clamor to have me go over their work "at once." Then I would be afraid of praising Anna or having to correct Sophia.

A few days ago, I noticed another pattern reversal. Anna's writing, for about three years, has been consistently more legible than Sophia's. The other day, I asked Anna to write a little ad for me to put up on a bulletin board. She did so, then went upstairs to get ready to go out. I looked at the ad, and it was absolutely illegible. There was no time for Anna to rewrite it, as we had to go out in a few minutes and she wasn't ready, so I asked Sophia to do it. She took great care over it, and I was pleasantly surprised. Her writing, though big, was perfectly neat and legible. I told her this, and she just glowed. She looked at it and said, "I write big, but I do write nicely!" When Anna came downstairs, I told her pleasantly that her ad had to be rewritten by Sophia, but she didn't seem to mind at all. Reflecting on this, I realized that Anna's writing had been getting more and more untidy for several months now, and that also for several months, I had avoided criticizing Sophia for hers. In fact I'd tried very hard to point out good things about it. The thing is, I believe that even when we think we are putting no pressure on our children, we still indicate by subtle clues of facial expressions or body language our disappointment, concern, or disapproval. We have to learn to detach from our children yet be there for them if they *ask* for help.

Anne-Marie, you could try telling Sophie that "for everything there is a season," and right now it's the season for her to enjoy mathematical concepts. With some children, they can only focus intensely on one thing at a time. Maria Montessori called this "sensitive periods." Maybe Sophie is in her sensitive period for arithmetic, or for something else. Whatever it is, if you discover it, you can encourage it and reassure her that the time for reading will come.

From Jennifer Sacksen of Pennsylvania:

My twin girls are almost 7, and they're opposites in many ways. I understand what Anne-Marie is saying because when my twins were younger, I tried to give them phonics lessons and it was exceptionally difficult. One was very interested and able to grasp it without any work on my part, and the other one had no interest at all and was very difficult to work with. This led me to back off. It takes patience and an astute mother to be able to keep competition to a minimum when learning rates and interests differ in any siblings, but perhaps especially in twins because sometimes they themselves seem to expect that they'll be able to do what the other one is doing.

It seems to me that one twin is more likely to feel bad about not being able to do something if it seems to her that that activity is really desirable. My advice is, don't set things up so that the twin who can't do the activity feels bad or excluded. Don't have obvious games or exercises that focus on reading ability, for example. If you read aloud to both of them, one may be following along with you and the other may just be listening, but they'll both be getting something out of it and it won't be as obvious that one is picking up reading more quickly than the other.

I also suggest taking the time to find other talents that they both must have, including talents that are different from one another's. There is no evidence to suggest that children need the three R's at such an early age and instead every evidence to show that a rich and varied background will build self-confidence that will help each twin cope with the other's ability to surpass her in a given field or at a given time.

From Joe Kelly of Minnesota:

Our twin daughters, now 15, have had very similar interests through the years. Nevertheless, they do have different ways of approaching the world, which we as parents sometimes struggle to remember and accept.

When they were in junior high after homeschooling for three years, Nia almost always took considerably more time to finish her homework than Mavis did. This was particularly true for algebra. Both girls ultimately got all the work done, understood the concepts, and got high grades, but Nia would sometimes be awake two hours later than Mavis trying to plow through the homework. She would get tired and frustrated, as would I. As I reflect on that time, however, it seems as though Nia was not comparing herself to Mavis as much as I was comparing her.

I was unhappy and frustrated that the girls had decided to return to school, so I was not in the most patient frame of mind. My frustration with the structure of school ("Why do they have to do all these hours of busywork at home, after spending hours on this stuff in school?") mixed together with my frustration over the discomfort Nia felt with her prolonged work hours ("Why can't she get this done like Mavis does?").

For her part, Nia's frustration seemed concentrated on the work itself, not so much on how quickly her sister or her classmates were getting it done. Mavis often takes a more laid-back approach, while Nia tends toward the perfectionistic. Nia also likes to see the big picture first, before taking the steps to fill that picture in. Part of this may be a desire for certainty. More than that, though, I think it is the way her mind works. It means that she learns better through large conceptualization than through rote exercises. Of course, that's why I believe she learns much more naturally (i.e., in tune with her nature) at home than at school. Both girls are out of school again, and they enjoy homeschooling most of the time. The greatest times of frustration still come when Nia seeks to find the big picture of her education into which she can fit the elements of what she is doing (or feels she should do) today. School, with its clearly marked grade levels and degrees, provides a visible "big picture" that may be part of its attraction.

Our girls are best friends and always have been. They have little problem being together for hours and days on end. It's as if the issue of who they are as individuals is settled between the two of them. But from a very early age, they made a point of publicly identifying themselves as individuals rather than as twins. They've never dressed alike or tried to fool anyone.

That public differentiation (and annoyance) is sometimes directed at us, too. We still have to be reminded that they are individuals, not a unit. And individuals develop, or choose to develop, in different ways. Even if Anne-Marie doesn't push Sophie to read, Sophie probably senses how important reading is to her mother (it is to most kids and parents who homeschool) and this struggle may be one of her first big stands to say, "I'm not Teresa!" And Teresa, like our Mavis, may not care so much about getting it right. But, like Mavis, she'll probably find other places to take her stand. It's OK. Stay connected with them and you'll all have the resiliency to live out this mystery of twinning.

Nia Kelly adds:

Despite the fact that my sister and I are twins and we have a nice sisterly bond, we are different people. Sophie and Teresa will have their own ways of learning things and this is OK. I suggest giving Sophie some one-on-one time apart from Teresa. Give them time and space to develop different personalities.

Mavis started reading before I did, but in my case, seeing Mavis read made me want to do it even more. It has helped throughout the years to have our parents encourage us to do things, whether they are the same things or different things. Lots of times, we did the same thing, like ballet. But we eventually branched off into different things – I kept doing ballet and Mavis started taking band. Having the same encouragement and support from our parents either way was a good thing.

And Mavis Gruver adds:

When Sophie feels frustrated about not reading, encourage her and tell her that she can do it. Ask if she wants some help or wants you to read with her. ◆

Challenges & Concerns

Support for "Mother Under Stress"

These writers are responding to a reader's letter in GWS #108.

From Nicky Hardenbergh (MA):

Your letter touched my heart, because I can remember those stressful times, especially when my kids were exactly those ages, 3 and 6. Now they are 12 and 15 and I am so grateful that we have been homeschooling all these years.

I think a real blessing of homeschooling is that in the process of being around our kids all day, we do finally develop healthier ways of dealing with each other. I have always had the image of a crucible: through the intense heat generated by emotional upheavals, we forge some new, healthier ways of dealing with our problems. If the kids were going off to school every day, I think we would never reach that intensity. You could call it the total immersion method.

It took me a long time – years! – to learn that I had a choice in my emotional reactions. More than once, my throat hurt for the rest of the day after I yelled at the kids. There may be homeschool moms who never lose their patience, but I know there are many more of us who struggle to learn new ways of dealing with our emotions. Neither my husband nor I grew up in a household in which healthy ways of dealing with anger were modeled. We are figuring this all out for ourselves as we go.

Here's what I recommend to you:

1. If you don't already, I hope you can afford to get a computer and a modem and sign on to American Online. There is a wonderful homeschool forum there, and you can be assured of getting support from other homeschool moms. Before I discovered this resource last year, I felt isolated as a homeschool mom. Now I feel part of a wonderful cyber community. It's the next best thing to having a wonderful friend next door who homeschools, too.

2. I read *Parachutes for Parents* by Bobbie Sandoz this year but wish I had read it long ago. The author clearly explains the problems with getting angry at our kids and coherently helps you maintain unconditional love at the same time you are providing discipline. I especially like the thought that we need to "put life on our agenda." We can't always expect that things will go according to our plans.

3. Everybody says this, and it's very hard to do when you are right there on the front lines, but relax about trying to "do school." If your power struggles are about academics, you really can back off.

From another reader:

Let me tell you how much I appreciated your letter. Your courage and honesty are wonderful. I don't have any specific advice for you, but I can tell you that I share in your feelings and struggles. My children, a boy and a girl, are two years apart. My son was a dynamo from his very first day. He slept little. Now almost 8, he is still dynamic. He channels a lot of his energy and intelligence into verbal jousting. He questions everything we ask him to do and is always ready to argue us to the point of exasperation. When I mentioned this to my mother, she told me I did exactly the same thing to her when I was a child. Is it genetics or similar parenting mistakes? Being in the middle of it, I can't tell, and I'm not sure it matters. It's still a constant irritating problem.

My daughter, almost 6, is generally more mellow, but right now she is going through a very rambunctious, physical stage.

We have some days that are wonderful, some that are truly awful, and most that are all right. I try to forgive myself for outbursts of temper. I ask them to forgive me, after I've calmed down. I tell them that even if I didn't like what they were doing, I could have found a better way to deal with it. I try to notice the good things they do. I try to get together with each one every day and just snuggle on the couch for a few minutes and tell them how much I love them. I think back to my own mother who often lost patience with us, but who also had a good side that I remember – her generosity and kindness, her intelligence and humor. She wasn't June Cleaver – she was a real person who totaled more good than bad – and I hope I'm the same.

One thing that keeps me going is an idea I picked up from Christian homeschooling author Mary Pride. She said that a lot of mothers stop homeschooling because they assess their situation on the assumption that things are always going to be *this way*. But it's not true. Children change and grow. Many of the battles disappear on their own. They will learn to read. They will learn to help around the house if we get them in the habit of doing so. Three-year-olds are beautiful but also stubborn and not tuned into the finer points of being reasoned with. But they won't always be 3. It will change. The changes my son has gone through since turning 7 are mind-boggling. He has days when he is positively awesome in maturity and helpfulness. If someone had told me those days were coming when I was struggling with a toddler, I wouldn't have believed it. But now I've seen it with my own eyes.

From Ann Yates (NC):

I have two boys, 3 and 1, and our third baby is due in May. I am ashamed of how I react to mother stress sometimes, but then again, I am human. I do the best I can do and I try to do the best for my children. Sometimes when I look back on a bad situation we have been through, I find that I was trying to do too much. Maybe I had too many errands in one day, or maybe one or both kids were just having "one of those days." At those times, I should just throw any other plans out the window, but

instead I forge ahead, trying to get letters written, phone calls made, or even the laundry done. I need to learn to let those things go and put my kids and my sanity first.

From Mary Broussard of Louisiana:

I know about being angry and irritable and short-tempered with my child. You ask whether it's better for your child to be home with you, the unhappy mother engaged in power struggles, or to be at school. My response would be that if you are unhappy now, you will probably be that way whether your children are in school or not. I have learned to look at situations going on with my child as a mirror of myself. Usually, my struggles with my child are about things I need to work on. I know that may not always be the case, but taking a look at it certainly couldn't hurt. I have a 6-year-old, am a single mother with no parenting support, and run a full-time business. Yes, it is stressful at times, but I prefer to look at those times as an opportunity to learn. If you can change your perspective on it, it will help. I still lose my temper, and I even scream sometimes, but I am quick to use those times as opportunities to learn and grow. Many times I tell people that I homeschool my daughter because I have so much to learn. Let your children teach you about the journey called life. I don't think they'll disappoint you.

From Sandra Brown (MI):

I, too, share the concerns of "Mother Under Stress." I feel that every day is a struggle for me, trying to learn a functional way of life. I am grateful to have a sensitive, supportive husband who will listen to me and not judge my feelings.

The best books I've found that give me support are those by Faber and Mazlish, in the "How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk" series. Also, I've found that the family bed has really nurtured a strong family bond for us, and breastfeeding my children has given me more strength than anything, I think.

I had no difficulty with my first, 4-year-old Emily, but after the birth of my twins (just before Emily was 3), we have had many challenges. I swore I would never, under any circumstances, spank a child of mine. But when my twins were three months old and I was awakened once or twice an hour at night, out of severe exhaustion and frustration I did spank Emily, and I don't even remember why. It was a single spank, and I stopped myself. I placed her on her bed and locked myself in the bathroom to calm down. Minutes later I told her that it was wrong of me to spank her, and that I was sorry, and we cried together. It was a very powerful moment for us and I have not spanked her again.

We have recently moved to a new city, over thirty miles from family and friends. It took a lot of courage, but I placed ads in local papers and on the local cable channel looking for other homeschoolers. I found two, and we meet once a week at my home to let the kids play, to make stuff, and to support each other.

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Here are some tips I have learned that help our days run smoothly:

1. Involve the kids in what you are doing. In my experience, they love to help wash dishes, fold laundry, make beds, stir soup, etc. Ten minutes of special helping-Mom time usually becomes an hour of quiet play.

2. Limit TV, both the kids' and yours. Commerical TV, especially, makes us all a little edgy.

3. Plan outings once or twice each week. With planning, even grocery shopping can be a fun, learning experience.

4. Look for other groups like Scouts, 4-H, etc.

5. Look for Parks and Rec activities. We drove 25 miles each week to a great playgroup for kids 6 months to 5 years old where parents had to stay with the kids. My 4-year-old did fun craft projects and I was able to sit on the floor with my twins and talk with other lonely mothers.

6. Create a daily routine, with little rituals, but remain flexible. Kids like to know what's going to happen next, and they need to feel involved and needed.

7. Plan something new each week. My 4-year-old and I have learned a lot together. We have learned how to make bread, taffy, tissue paper angels, paper chains, etc. In my experience, kids like to watch adults do interesting things. This year I am planning to do something I have always wanted to do – learn to make patchwork quilts.

8. Volunteer. Helping others truly builds your self-esteem and helps you count your blessings. I am currently working on becoming a La Leche League leader.

9. Don't give up! There are plenty of books out there to help you with handling stress and parenting positively. Read as much as you can, but if a book makes you angry, don't read any more; find another one that helps you feel good about parenting.

I want to encourage "mother under stress" that it's not important to have *dealt* with these issues successfully. It is important to take each day as it comes. Every day provides a new challenge, so just keep trying to learn more and to learn together with your children – that is the best part of homeschooling. ◆

Focus

Homeschooling Abroad

In Jamaica, West Indies

Sally Sherman writes:

I'm a single parent, and we spend half our time in Jamaica and half in Miami. We would probably be homeschooling no matter where we lived, although my 11-year-old son, Theo, says it would depend on how strict the school is. Although we are not homeschooling specifically because of the school situation in Jamaica, that would be a good reason to homeschool, as the schools here are overcrowded and there are very few supplies available. Most of the teachers are so dedicated that they will take a worksheet and rewrite it 30 or 40 times because not only are there no workbooks but there are also not many copy machines.

I have a friend here who is considering homeschooling her son, and I know there are other homeschoolers here, mostly Rastafarians, but we are not close to any. When I asked Theo how others view his homeschooling, he said his friends think he is lucky. I find that if I'm talking to someone who seems satisfied and unburdened in life, they think homeschooling is a good idea. I tell them that my son's interests – computers, CB radios, building things – are not offered in schools, and they agree that learning about one's interests makes sense. But everyone else doesn't understand why my son is not going to a "good" school when we can afford one. I think if we were locals, we would receive more criticism, but because we are already so different, people do not expect us to be normal.

Theo knows the local language (Jamaicans speak English; however, the rural people speak patois) because he grew up here, but I don't, so he deals with a parent who doesn't always understand him when he is with Jamaicans. There are many cultural and economic differences between us and the locals. Theo always has more than the other kids – toys, allowance, etc. The other kids want to be friends with him, but their interest may come from wanting to play with his things, not from genuinely liking him. It could be easy for him to take a superior attitude to the other kids because there are unspoken racial and economic hierarchies. Jamaicans think we are rich because we come and go as we please. When we are in Miami, we are like everyone else except that we travel frequently.

When I read GWS, I am aware that most homeschoolers have to deal with authorities. We don't have anyone we need to report to. Theo went to a boarding school when he was 8-10 years old, and when he decided not to return, the greatest criticism we received was from the parents of his school friends. The faculty didn't say anything and I think it's because they think we will change our minds and he will return eventually.

I enjoy reading about other homeschoolers' predicaments and I especially enjoy it when the children write about their own situations. I think I gathered enough confidence to begin homeschooling again while reading *Real Lives*. I feel a certain kinship with others who are homeschooling and hope to do an exchange with another family at some point.

In Spain

Birgan Norberg writes:

In Spain, a small percentage of children don't go to school not because their parents are homeschooling them but because they are being used as labor or are just hanging around in the streets. Mainly this exists among poor gypsy families. Homeschooling families have also existed all along, but very little is known about the option of homeschooling. Individual families kept their kids out of school for different reasons, a lot of times without knowing about anybody else doing it. Or several families got together – perhaps they lived together on a farm – and educated their children together.

In 1989, a copy of Growing Without Schooling was translated into Spanish by a young American woman named Elsa Haas, who had worked at GWS [see issues #72 and #78 for more about this]. Elsa sold copies of the newsletter and started getting together with about 10-20 homeschooling families.

In 1993, the first national meeting of homeschoolers was held in our home. We put an ad in an alternative magazine and sent letters to the people Elsa knew, and to our surprise, we had 50 people (half of them children) present, coming from all parts of Spain. Since then, seven national meetings have been held, most of them week-long camps with about 50 people attending (not all the same each time). We are trying to build up a network of families who can keep supporting each other. We have a bulletin for communication between meetings.

We have personally been in contact with 35-40 families who have children of obligatory school age (6-14 years old) who keep their kids at home. We know there are a lot more such families. As homeschoolers we should also count those with kids under 6 who are still at home. Most people actually believe that obligatory schooling starts at 4 and the usual practice is to put kids in school when they are almost babies, so people whose kids are not yet in school at 4 or 5 probably feel like homeschoolers.

As far as we know, no family has had serious legal problems. Most families just homeschool and nobody cares about it, even if the family is completely open about it. Some families are afraid and do it completely in secret. Some families have had visits from social workers, but normally they have been able to see that this is a family that takes good care of its children, and they haven't caused any trouble. Other families have had to go to the Department of Education in the town hall and explain what they are doing and why. One family had to go to the Ministry of Education in Madrid. They all get told that it is illegal and that they need to send their kids to school, but they keep on just like before and nothing more has happened.

Recently, we had a court case involving three families who were living on a farm together. They have homeschooled for ten years and have eleven kids altogether. Although several months have passed, they still have not received a sentence, but the rumors say that the parents will get house arrest for ten days. The parents want to bring it up to higher court to set a precedent. It seems that several families educating their children together is seen as more dangerous than one family doing it.

Technically, homeschooling is only legal in Spain in special cases; children are allowed to take correspondence courses if their parents travel a lot because of their work or if they live very far from a school. In recent years, there were newspaper headlines like, "150 families sentenced for not sending their children to school," but these were always cases such as I mentioned earlier – poor, mostly gypsy families. But what the general public understands from headlines like this is that homeschooling is illegal. Yet an article about these 150 families quoted a judge as saying that he was not condemning them for not sending their children to school, but rather for not fulfilling their parental obligations in general. He said if a family did homeschool, he would reach the opposite conclusion: that they were taking better care of their children, and thus it would not be illegal.

Our personal situation is this: we are a Swedish-Hungarian family and have been living in Spain for eight years. If we had stayed in Sweden, I think we would never have gotten into homeschooling. Our kids would have been in an alternative school. But there was no alternative school around here and our son started in the public school. After two and a half years we saw no other option but to take him out; he had been begging for it for so long.

Now if we were to move back to Sweden or to any other country, we would continue homeschooling. We have not had any legal problems and we are very open about homeschooling. Our son, who is now 14, has been taking courses for adults, and we have so far not had any problems because of his lack of schooling. If he would like to go on to high school or college or university – well, we don't know how that would be possible. If that day comes, we will deal with it then. As there are so few homeschoolers here, and hardly anybody older than he is, there is no road ready made yet. (One girl did start high school without having gone to school before.)

I think homeschooling will grow here in Spain, but slowly. In the last year, we have gotten three big articles published in magazines, had one program on national TV, and had several panel debates.

When we read GWS, sometimes we think we'd better move to the States! We miss not having a support network locally (although we are working on it, and it's growing, it's still on a national level rather than local) or just some homeschooling friends with kids more or less the same age as ours. The isolation sometimes makes it difficult. Of course school can be the place to get to know other children, get into the culture, learn the language, etc. But our children learned the language from their neighbors, and now they participate in out-of-school activities with other children and also with adults. We don't live life in a foreign ghetto, so they are part of the Spanish life as well as having a connection to Sweden and Hungary.

In Yap, Micronesia

Lynda Norton writes:

We have lived here in Yap (southwest of Guam, east of the Philippines, north of New Guinea) for ten years, since our son was six weeks old. Isaiah is now 10, Ru'ya is 7 1/2, and Maryam will soon be 1.

We are homeschooling for two reasons: (1) the education here is for the most part substandard level, and (2) we enjoy the flexibility of available time to study and practice our interests in music, electronics, art, and carpentry. Unless we had access to a good international school, I believe we would homeschool regardless of where we lived.

Yap is 36 square miles with a population of around 9000. As far as I know, only expatriates are homeschooling. While I am aware of the handful of families who homeschool here, and there are occasional meetings for the mothers or field trips for the children, my support is mostly from GWS and from our own meditation/reflection on education, since, unlike the other homeschoolers here, I am not worried about not having standardized tests or highly structured programs.

The reason we live in Yap is that when we married, my

husband and I made the goal to live in a developing country as soon as we could, which was almost two years later. We are Baha'is and are strongly motivated and committed to serving our faith and mankind in an underprivileged area of the world. Our children speak a little Yapese and have friends (both their age and adult) who are Yapese, Palauan, Outer Islanders of Yap, Filipino, Persian, Malaysian, Swedish, American, Japanese, Burmese, Nepalese, and Australian. We are all very interested in learning about customs of every culture. One of the most interesting local skills here, which unfortunately is fading, is the building and navigation of outrigger canoes over long ocean voyages, which was done by reading signs of the skies and the swells of the ocean.

Local people who know we homeschool feel it is very good. A few have said they would like to do the same but have not done so, probably because of inexperience and financial limitations (minimum wage is 85¢ an hour here). It is also very difficult to do something out of the norm here since group identification is most prominent and it is felt that any progress should be made as a group.

Our daily schedule begins with morning prayers and devotions that last 20-30 minutes and include recitations of memorized prayers and tablets. Our children have memorized extensively, and this has been totally non-forced and their desire. We strongly believe that this regular practice has enhanced their ability to learn in general, and it has brought about their awareness of the quality of self-discipline.

The day continues with breakfast and chores, and all is balanced with taking care of baby Maryam. Almost every day the older children study math in a workbook. I give assignments for language arts and we have texts for science, health, and history, but most of that is learned on their own through their own investigations. We listen to the short-wave radio every day, and BBC and VOA have some good educational programs on current events and history. We talk a great deal about these subjects.

Our income is limited and therefore we are all quite resourceful. Many of our books were given to us by people who left Yap and didn't want them anymore. A major emphasis in our education is nightly reading, which is usually done with Papa for often up to an hour and sometimes longer. It is a special time for all of us to learn and be together.

In Japan and Hong Kong

From Candis Litsey (Hong Kong):

We have been homeschooling since 1987, when we first moved overseas. I am not sure we can say that we would have homeschooled regardless of where we lived. It would be more accurate to say that a combination of factors brought us to homeschooling.

Years before we had children, I had read one or two of John Holt's books as part of an education course in college, and I remember being impressed with the attitude of respect toward children that was evident on every page. After the children were born, I subscribed to *Mothering* magazine, which occasionally ran articles about homeschooling, and I found myself agreeing with a lot of the reasons for homeschooling that parents gave.

Maryam and Isaiah Norton in Yap

When my husband's work took us to London for a two-year assignment, Evan was not quite 5 and Sarah was 2 1/2. For various reasons, none of the schools we looked at in London seemed to be what we were looking for. When I contacted Education Otherwise (the British homeschooling organization), they put me in touch with an enthusiastic and friendly English homeschooling family. After some hesitation, we decided we would homeschool for our two years in London, and when we returned to the States, Evan would be 7 and ready for first grade.

When it became clear that we would be overseas past that two-year period, we continued to homeschool because we enjoyed the freedom to explore all the cultural and historical resources in London without being constrained by school schedules, the children had a rich social life through neighborhood friends and through our weekly meetings with homeschoolers, and we felt that Evan, who showed signs of being a late reader, would do better in a homeschooling situation.

In London, we had lots of support from fellow homeschoolers, and because we were not U.K. citizens, the local schools and the child welfare system did not query us; they may have assumed we were sending our children to one of the international or private schools. At the time, I felt that homeschooling was easier in the U.K. than in the U.S., partly because educational policy was made at the national level so there wasn't the tremendous variety of regulations that you find in the U.S. On the other hand, I think it's easier to enter college from homeschooling in the U.S.

In 1991, we moved to Tokyo. The children found leaving London very traumatic, so that colored our first six months in Japan. We had purposely moved into a non-expatriate neighborhood and started Japanese lessons so that we could make Japanese friends. But we never seemed to be able to get past the level of casual interactions in parks and shops. My sense is that we would have gotten

Sarah Litsey rollerblading in Hong Kong.

further if we had had an intermediary, someone who could introduce us to our neighbors and help out if there were misunderstandings. Unlike in London, I definitely feel that the children would have made more friends and learned more Japanese if they had gone to school there. When we had enough Japanese to explain why the children were at home, it was clear that people found this incomprehensible. The mother of my husband's Japanese friend explained to me that in the Japanese culture, the friends you make in school, even in primary school, are the beginnings of a personal support network. Whether you knew each other or not, just having gone to the same school carries implied bonds that can be called on later in life. By Japanese standards, our choice was detrimental to our children's future success. But again, as in the U.K., homeschooling was easier for us because as foreigners we were not expected to conform to cultural norms. (Pat Montgomery of Clonlara is very knowledgeable on the subject of Japanese homeschoolers [see GWS #100]).

As far as I am aware, we were the only non-Japanese homeschooling family in Tokyo for almost all our stay. Our daily activities during the week were mostly home-centered. The children preferred me reading aloud to any other activity. Evan, who is keen on sports, found an outlet through the junior sports leagues sponsored each season by the American club. Sarah made friends with some American girls in the neighborhood.

I found Japan a very child-friendly place. For example, not far from our home was a small park that we called the bicycle park. They had constructed a child-size figure eight bicycle/traffic learning park. There were working pedestrian walk signs, traffic signals, and train tracks with warning lights. Parents could rent a bike (free of charge) that was suitable for the child's skill and size. I was also impressed by the child-sized wood shop, complete with supplies and experienced supervisors available to consult, that was part of a special children's facility sponsored by the Tokyo City Council, also at no charge.

In 1994, we moved to Hong Kong. My husband and I had lived here before so we were familiar with the city and the lifestyle. Through the GWS Directory and friends from before, I contacted two of the homeschooling families here (both of whom were expatriate, not Hong Kong Chinese) to talk about what homeschooling in Hong Kong was like. Both confirmed that it was do-able and working for them.

Before we moved, I had checked into the situation for team sports for children. Unlike in Tokyo, they were only available through the schools, so Evan decided that he wanted to go to school in Hong Kong. For the last six months that we were in Tokyo, he worked very hard with a tutor to bring some of his academic skills up to grade level. We applied to two of the international schools in Hong Kong, but neither worked out (international schools overseas are not public schools; they don't *have* to accept students). The problem seemed to be Evan's lack of prior school records. We expected Evan to be disappointed but were pleasantly surprised. Our late reader had discovered books and no longer wanted to go to school because it would interfere with his reading! I have since signed both kids up with Clonlara Home Based Education Program, which will provide us with curricula and use my reports on their progress to construct school records. I want to have these available because Sarah seems to be interested in trying school soon.

Articles on homeschooling in American national magazines have made more of the Americans here familiar with the concept. I have been interviewed by the American Women's Club here and last month I was asked to give an informal talk about homeschooling to a group of (mostly American) mothers living in our apartment complex. Their reactions were no different from those I experienced in London or back in the States, but the few times that homeschooling has come up with any of our Hong Kong Chinese acquaintances, I have the impression that the idea totally bewilders them but they are too polite to say anything.

When I read about homeschoolers in GWS or through Clonlara, or when I visit homeschooling groups in the U.S. when we are on vacation, I do feel envious sometimes, because we miss the support of having other homeschooling parents to talk to and the kids miss being with a big group of kids who do things the way they do (Hong Kong is the first place Evan and Sarah have been teased about not going to school). We seem to miss out on a sort of connectedness to community that I read about – work with community theaters, for example. Opportunities to do apprenticeships and activities like that seem more limited when one moves around. But then I just remind myself that the limitations we see as constrictive are often the ones we have put here ourselves. ◆

Watching Children Learn

If Not Grammar Textbooks, Then What?

[SS:] Now and then people ask me if I think grammar textbooks and workbooks are necessary or even useful. For example, a 15-year-old wrote recently:

Today was my day to do "school-work" with my mother, and it ended very unsatisfactorily. I really want to get a better command of English when I write, and so we have been working out of a textbook. There is soooo much useless information in there! We are both overwhelmed by the sheer amount of "rules of usage" and figuring out whether or not I need to know them. Do you really need to know all that to succeed (provided you don't want to be an English teacher)? I tend to think not, but since I do need to know some of it, I have to figure out *how* to learn it. The textbook has been frustrating for both of us, so we wanted to know if you have any advice.

I thought it might be interesting and even, I hope, helpful for others to see my reply, since there are probably others out there who are struggling with similar questions. Also, I think it's continually important for all of us to distinguish between "work" and "schoolwork." That is, typical school assignments often aren't the best way to learn how to do something, but that doesn't mean there's nothing one can do at all. The trick is to sort out what the real work of writing, or math, or science, or whatever, actually is for the people who engage in those activities, and then to think about how to invite young people to join in that work. That's what the math stories in GWS #107 were about, in a way, and what the science stories in GWS #102 and #103 were about, and what so many of our stories address. And all these stories are a way of answering the question that I haven't stopped thinking about since I wrote about it in GWS #106: "Does Unschooling Mean Leaving Kids Alone?" Another way to phrase it would be "Does not doing what school does mean there's nothing we can do at all?" With that in mind, I wrote the suggestions that follow. The girl who asked me the question is someone I know fairly well and have been working with for a while, so I wrote these suggestions in the spirit and context of that familiarity. I might not have been so emphatic with someone whose situation I knew less well, but the basic idea would be the same.

... Your writing is clear, natural, and unforced, and it is most certainly *not* full of grammatical errors. Now, I'm not saying that that's the end of the discussion and that there's nothing left for you to do if you want to work on writing, but let's try to be clear about what that work might involve. When you say you want to get a better command of English when you write, I'd have to know more of what that means to you in order to answer you fully. Do you mean that you want to write more clearly, more smoothly, more interestingly – in general, to write better? Or do you mean that you want to know some of the official names for things you actually already know how to write? For example, your little brothers may not know what the phrase "past tense" means, but they know how to say "I walked." Maybe you are curious to know more about the official names for things, which is fine and can be worthwhile, but remember that you didn't teach your brothers what "past tense" meant *before* they learned to use it, and the same is true for you and your writing.

I didn't learn to write clearly and powerfully, or even correctly, by studying a grammar textbook. I'm going to say something that may sound like a huge generalization, but I really believe it: the single most important ability, for what I think you're trying to achieve, is a good ear. I mean an inner ear, because we're talking about an ear for written language, not just for spoken language, and you get that in large measure from reading good writing. The idea is to have immersed yourself in good writing for so long that you can tell when something just *sounds* wrong. I'd recommend that as a better, more reliable guide when you're evaluating your own writing than a grammar textbook, and that's why any suggestions I'll make, in a minute, will be about ear training, not about grammar study. This is especially true because so many of the choices we make in writing aren't just between correct and incorrect but between correct-but-it-sounds-clunky-and-awkward and correct-and-also-smooth-and-clear.

I said that I don't think there's anything wrong with your wanting to set aside specific times to work on writing, but since you asked my advice, I'll tell you that what *I'd* rather see you do during those times would be: (1) read good writing; (2) type or write over some of this good writing (that may sound strange, and it's certainly not a requirement, but it's an idea. I typed hundreds of pages of John Holt's letters for the book I edited, and in doing that I got his prose into my fingers. It's a great way to apprentice to someone without even meaning to, because typing forces you to attend to every word and every comma in a way that reading doesn't); (3) look through some books about writing, but not just grammar textbooks. Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* would be my first recommendation, as it is short, to the point, and has helped writers for decades. I'd also recommend Peter Stillman's *Write Away: A Friendly Guide for Teenage Writers*, which we sell here. It has suggestions of writing exercises to try,

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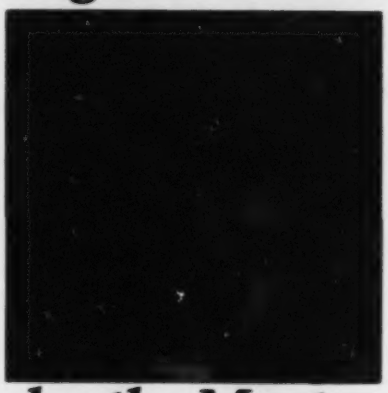

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but it has none of the textbook/workbook feeling, none at all. (4) Write, write, write! You do this already, but it's really the main thing, and I should have listed it first. If you then want to, you could ask someone else to point out any grammatical errors or to suggest how something might be worded more smoothly. In that context, I think the information about rules would make sense to you and would stick. ...

Homeschooling Her Niece

In GWS #107, our Focus section was about kids who are homeschooling with someone other than the parent as the primary adult involved. Now Norma Young (PA) writes:

This year my niece, Dawn, has come to live with us and be homeschooled. This was undertaken at her request and with the blessing of my parents, her legal guardians. Dawn joins our child Jacky, 10 1/2, who has been homeschooled since age 5.

Dawn had a rather chaotic early childhood, and due to family problems she lived with my parents until she was 12, when she returned to her own parents. She was always a very friendly, outgoing girl who liked school for the social interaction but was rather indifferent to the academics. My mother worked with her quite a bit, and Dawn did well, according to her grades.

My mom has always been very supportive of our homeschooling, and when she discussed difficulties that Dawn was having in certain areas, I became certain that Dawn could benefit from homeschooling. Dawn was always curious about what we did, but when she returned to living with her parents, the idea of homeschooling flew out the window. My brother subsequently divorced his wife and became a single parent. These changes, along with entry into middle school, began to take their toll on Dawn. My mom and I became concerned as we saw a wonderfully delightful person descend into cynicism and bitterness. She often asked my mother about our homeschooling and more than once expressed a desire to try it.

My mother and I discussed the possibility. Pennsylania law is rather burdensome and regulatory, but I felt that I could manage to work around the law and give Dawn the breathing space she needed to gather herself back together again. According to the law, the parent or legal guardian has to be the supervisor of the homeschooling, and since my parents still retained legal custody of Dawn, that posed no problem.

We discussed the idea within our own family. My husband felt it should have happened a long time ago. My daughter, who adores her cousin, couldn't wait. My mother and I approached Dawn and her father last spring, and, after seeing her final grades, we decided that she would come to live with us for one year and try homeschooling. We knew it would be an adjustment, not just to homeschooling but for the two only children suddenly to have to share space.

Over the summer I had Dawn take several placement tests to determine her grade level in math. After observing her attitudes toward school and learning in general, I decided that she needed to be brought up to grade level in math because her confidence was low and she needed a math program that would build her up and give her a measurable success. We decided on Saxon 7/6 for Dawn and 5/4 for Jacky. In all other subjects, I took a "wait and see" approach.

We began the year planning to complete four Saxon lessons per week. Dawn is interested in the Holocaust and we went to the library where she took out books about this and whatever else she was interested in. She wrote poetry and we talked a lot about political situations during (and before and after) World War II. Jacky, Dawn, and I have notebooks where we all post questions to each other on every subject under the sun, and these have led to lively discussion. Dawn got up and went to bed when she wanted to; I basically kept a hands-off policy, giving her time to move into our rhythms.

This all rather puzzled her at first. She expected me to have a more teacherly role. She wasn't used to making her own educational choices

and in some respects she seemed angry when forced to accept responsibility for her learning. When she was in school, the only choice was whether or not to complete an assignment. Lacking any measure of control in her life, she more or less used passive resistance as a way to assert herself. She wanted me to give her assignments so she could decide whether or not to do them, thus gaining control.

The fact that I expected her to do what pleased her took (and is still taking) some getting used to. I think it became almost overwhelming to her, and I noticed this and decided that maybe she needed a little more direction though she would still maintain the bulk of control.

Meanwhile, Jacky, who has been almost totally unschooled, began to express a desire to have "work to do" like Dawn. This made me laugh because any attempt to give lessons before had always resulted in arguments and tears.

I reached a compromise with myself. I would make a list of monthly requirements for the girls. Some examples are: produce a written factual report, read a biography, read two books of any type, write a story or poetry, follow a current event throughout the month, pick an event or discovery and describe what effect it has had on our society. I encourage them to find different ways to present these things (Jacky likes to pretend to be a radio talk show host interviewing different characters).

In this way, Dawn can feel that she has a goal to reach but she still maintains control over how she achieves it and what the subject matter is. We have only implemented this new plan this month, but it seems to be working. I hope that after Dawn takes this minimal direction from me, she will soon find that she doesn't need it. And meanwhile, Jacky is exposed to different aspects of education that she otherwise might not have had a chance to experience right now.

Dawn has said that she feels much more relaxed about learning and about things in general. When she first came to us, she was fidgety and tense. Now there seems to be more of a quietness about her. The lessening of peer exposure seems almost a relief to her. She is now spending time with friends that are chosen instead of incidental.

We are making arrangements to add another room to our house to give her the privacy she needs with her own bedroom. We have told her that if at the end of this school year, she decides to return to school, she can attend the high school here and still live with us but that she can also homeschool with us as long as she chooses to. The only concern we have is about the law's requirements for high school and the authorities' view of a proper education. But we will deal with these problems as they arise. For the time being, our first concern is letting Dawn become happy with herself. Jacky and Dawn light up our house and our only regret is that we didn't do this sooner.

Dawn McMahon adds:

My reasons for choosing to homeschool are many. One is dissatisfaction with the way school tried to force their way of education down my throat. Another is having eight hours of my day planned around a fifty-minute bell. When I was in school I felt as if I had no say in anything; they told me when it was a good time to use the bathroom, gave me a certain time when I could eat, and the worst part was, they told us what we would learn and how long we would have to learn it before we were tested on it.

After fifth grade, I really started to be uninterested in school. My social life became more important, and that's when I went from getting B's to getting D's. My only reason for going to school was to see my friends. School just became so boring that I started finding my way into trouble just for something to do. By the end of eighth grade I was flunking out of school because I didn't care, and by second period I was already making plans for after school.

... I thought [homeschooling] seemed interesting and I felt that I needed a rest from all the confusion and frustration. It has been wonderful to focus on what my interests are instead of what someone thinks they should be. I am still trying to get rid of some of my old school habits. It is

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almost as if I was detoxifying my brain.

Some things about homeschooling bother me, like having to keep a portfolio of my work and always wondering if my work will satisfy the district guys. My aunt feels I need an unstructured atmosphere and I agree. Hopefully we won't run into any trouble.

The things that I like about homeschooling are taking my time to learn what interests me. For once I am having fun and I like learning. I thought I never would. There is no one telling me, "OK, now tomorrow I am going to test you and see how you are doing." I finally have some say in what I am doing, which I should because it's my education and I am the one who is going to have to make the decisions for what I do, not anybody else.

What Are Grown-Up Homeschoolers Doing?

When we update our Grown-Up Homeschoolers list (see p. 29), we often get updates about how these grown homeschoolers are doing, too. Here are some short notes that came with the listings:

From an article in the 9/3/95 issue of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette featuring homeschooler Jesse Richman, who is now at the University of Pittsburgh Honors College:

... At Pitt, Jesse Richman lives in an off-campus apartment that has a piano and a computer but no TV. He is taking 16 credits toward a double major in English and social science and is Pitt's first homeschooled honors college student.

In his early years, he kept at his studies because his mother encouraged him to. Later on, he said, it was because he wanted to. "One of the advantages I think about homeschooling is that it forced you to motivate yourself," Richman said. He doesn't believe he missed anything by not attending school and did not feel isolated. And he joined other children in a couple of special summer education programs.

Still, he's looking forward to the switch. "I've had undivided attention," he said. "It's time to see the other end of the spectrum."

Richman was picked for the honors college based on his SAT performance and an interview which wowed school officials, said Alec Stewart, dean of the college. "If that's an indication of homeschooling, then we've got a lot to learn from the homeschooling movement," he said.

Anne Brosnan, whom some readers may remember from the book Real Lives, *writes:*

I'm an editor of a newspaper in Renfro Valley, Kentucky. It's a monthly tabloid called *The Renfro Valley Bugle*. It has 4,000 subscribers and its general topics are special events, concerts, entertainers, guest performers, village and employee news, local interest, tourism, Kentucky history, etc.

How did I get this job? It was advertised as a clerical position, and they didn't even know I could write at the time. I started out as the assistant in October 1994 when I was 17, and I quickly advanced to editor by the following March (when I had just turned 18). What happened was that there were several editor changes due to a death, someone quitting, and a termination, and after I (as the assistant) had trained a couple of editors who then left, I finally walked into the CEO's office and told him it would be much easier to hire me as the editor and let me train an assistant. He agreed, and he also agreed when I told him who I wanted to have for my assistant.

This is a 9–5 job, but I also have time for music (which is why I originally came to Kentucky). I am a banjo player and singer in a band, I've been in the recording studio and am on CD now, and I perform in a skit/mime group all over Kentucky.

Erin Roberts, who was also in Real Lives, *writes:*

I graduated from Hagerstown Junior College (first in the class with a 4.0 GPA, for whatever that's worth) and then I took a year off and interned in my Congressman's district office. This past Spring I interned as a program assistant for the National 4-H Council in Chevy Chase, MD. In June I was elected to the Board of Trustees for National 4-H Council as their third youth member.

I'm now at Bethany College in West Virginia as a junior with a double major in Communications and Political Science. I just lost an election for Student Government President, and I've started a collegiate 4-H club here. I played varsity soccer and I'm writing for the student newspaper. I really like it here at Bethany. The faculty have been great at working with me to test out of some classes so I can graduate on time, and they transferred me in as a full junior.

Next semester, I'm going to write a paper on the politics of homeschooling that my professor and I are going to try to present at a political science conference. This professor had me come be a guest lecturer for his public policy class, talking on homeschooling. That's the nice thing about being at a school with 750 students – the professors get to know who you are very quickly. I talked to the class and answered questions about homeschooling for about an hour.

In GWS #89, Emily Murphy told about her experiences doing museum work as a homeschooler and then going to St. John's College with the goal of going into museum studies later on. Now her mother, Madalene Murphy, writes:

Emily graduated from St. John's and now has a year's contract to write a pictorial history of the college, based on her own proposal and her work in their photo archives. Soon after her book proposal was accepted, she was offered a full-time job as assistant registrar of special collections at the Maryland State Archive in Annapolis, which means she is head of their extensive photo archives and is responsible for preservation, acquisition, research, etc. She negotiated the job down to 70% until February when most of her heavy work on the book will be done and she will be overseeing the design and printing. She will probably go to graduate school at some point but is now pleased and very busy. ◆

Alternatives to College

Working at the Library

From Mae Shell (VT):

When I began volunteering at the library two years ago (in September of 1993), I didn't realize that it would lead to my first paying job. At that time, volunteering was simply a way of getting out into the world and interacting with other people. I volunteered one hour a week, on Wednesday mornings, at the circulation desk. I already knew a few of the librarians, having spent quite a bit of time in the library as an avid reader. Before long I felt like I had carved out a little niche for myself and I enjoyed having a place to go away from home where I felt so comfortable.

Gradually, I increased my volunteer time to five hours a week. Last fall, I began taking classes at the local community college, which cut into my volunteer time a bit, but I continued to volunteer. By this time, I had decided that what I really wanted to do as a career was work in a library, and I had begun thinking seriously about going to college full time at some point to pursue a degree in either Library Science or Literature. In January, I had the opportunity to do inventory with the children's librarian, which took four days. I enjoyed it so much, and afterwards felt bored with what I was doing outside of the library. I considered taking no college classes the next semester, in pursuit of spending all my time at the library.

Ultimately, I decided to take two more classes during the spring semester. Then, in February, I was offered the chance to fill in for one of the librarians who worked part time; she was going on vacation for a month. I accepted, of course, and so began working for pay, six hours a week. If things had worked out as planned, I probably would have gone back to volunteering after the vacationing librarian got back. But life took a sudden unexpected turn, as it often does. During a bad snowstorm in March, another of the librarians, who also worked part time, slipped and broke her hip. I began working her hours, filling in until she was able to come back. This increased my hours to 12 a week, and I still came to volunteer another 10 hours a week.

It felt good to be working, but of course it was very temporary. No one knew just how long it would take Effie, the librarian who broke her hip, to recover. As it turned out, it was not until September that she came back. I had assumed for a long time that I would simply go back to volunteering when Effie came back, and would have to find a job to earn money somewhere else. But as it turned out, life once again dealt in my favor, though this time no tragedy was involved.

Yet another librarian, who had worked at the library and at another job, became unable to keep working at the library, so her place was empty and I began working her hours permanently, after Labor Day. I was also given my own hours on Wednesday afternoons. As I write this, I am working nine hours a week and volunteering six. Though my paid work hours are now fewer than before, they are permanent, and I have been given many opportunities to fill in for librarians who are on vacation for a week or two. Plus, I am now being paid to make posters for various library events.

At this point, I see no reason to go to college. I have always had mixed feelings about college. When I was younger, I assumed that I would never go. When I decided to pursue becoming a librarian, I knew that in order to really succeed, I would have to get at least a B.A. and probably an M.A. as well. I didn't really want to go to college; academia has never appealed to me, and after taking the classes at the community college, I saw how diminished my usual creative writing became when I was being assigned papers to write. I got burned out doing the assignments, and had little or no energy for writing essays and poems on my own. I have always loved to read and write, but somehow, being forced to do those things and to do them within rigid guidelines took all the fun and adventure out of it. As a lifelong unschooler, I have always felt that it is real skills, and not a piece of paper, that defines how much a person knows in any particular area. I felt that going to college to get a degree so that I could work in a library was backwards; wouldn't I surely learn more about how libraries work by working in a library?

I debated all summer whether I should pursue college this fall. For a few months, I stood by the decision that I would take a few courses the first semester at Burlington College and see how I liked it. But as September rapidly approached, I began to realize that I really didn't want to take classes; what I really wanted was to continue working and volunteering at the library and to pursue writing on my own time. Things have turned out wonderfully – that is exactly what I am now doing.

I will probably never be a proper librarian. I will also probably never go to college. But I will continue working in the library, and I hope I will make something of my writing as well. I have seen in the last few years how good, hard work, commitment, and dedication can show people that I am genuinely capable of doing the things I enjoy and of being successful as well. Although I am not now making nearly enough money to live on my own, it doesn't matter. Right now, I am living at home with my parents. I used to do a lot of babysitting, which didn't pay very well either, but I did enough of it, and earned enough money, to buy myself a horse and a laptop computer. With some of the money I have made

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so far at the library, I bought myself a regular desktop computer.

I hope to find success without going into debt paying for college. So far, I have. In this day and age, when people who have Ph.D's write into Ann Landers and Dear Abby complaining about not being able to find work, I wonder how much a college education means anyway. If you learn from it, then it is worth something. But if it is just a piece of paper, then it means nothing. Someday I hope things change and that no one needs a degree to get a job. My idea of utopia is a society in which people are judged by their expertise, by what they have actually done and what they can do. There is hope for a better world, and every person who decides to make life their teacher adds to that hope.

Deciding to Leave College

Sarah Shapiro, who gave us valuable volunteer help during the 1994-95 academic year, writes:

When I started to think about ending my school career, I thought a lot about all the things I would no longer have to deal with. I would not be graded and ranked. (I found grading to be a degrading process even when I was graded well, as I often was.) I would not have to worry about taking tests, writing papers, or keeping my resentment of schools and teachers under wraps long enough to go through the motions. I could stop doing work that I was doing only because someone else had decided it would be good for me. I could disassociate myself from a system that had hurt my friends and that I suspected was also hurting me in some intangible ways. I had spent large amounts of time in classes or doing schoolwork, and finally, now, I could stop killing time.

By the time I finished high school, I knew very clearly that more school was not what I wanted. But I had spent so much time in school already that I didn't know what I *did* want. I think this was one of school's more harmful aftereffects. I had no idea how to proceed. I had applied to college on schedule, because I was at a loss about what else I might want to do, and I chose Brown University because it seemed like it would be less school-like than other schools (it has no specific course requirements and students can choose to take all their courses on a pass/fail basis). But I did know how much I hated school, so I decided to take a year off (a year "on," really) before going to college. I couldn't face going straight into another year of what felt to me like irrelevant, useless, even harmful rituals.

I'm lucky enough to have parents who have supported me even when they had their doubts about what I was doing. So I decided to defer admission to Brown and take a year before college to start recuperating from school and tentatively start to do other things.

Figuring out what I wanted to be doing was not easy, though. I fell into different jobs and activities, usually by accident. There was a lot of floundering, despair, and emptiness along the way. Perhaps because I was still recovering from school, I was not able to explore enough interesting possibilities out in the world during that year to make going back to school seem unnecessary, so I did decide to go to Brown the following year.

I think the year out of school did give me the rest and recovery time that I needed to regain my internal equilibrium, though, because when I was back in school after a year off, I was able to approach things differently. College gave me more control over what I did and when I did it than high school had. I set up my schedule so that my classes met only three days a week, and the rest of my time was for other things. At first, I had no idea what these might be beyond merely an escape from the school routine. But one thing led to another, and I began working at an organic farm and then helping out at GWS. I started to juggle. I let myself get lost in the library for hours on end.

When I did have to attend to schoolwork and classes, I was angry at the way they were intruding on my life. I hated them bitterly, and sometimes felt that I just couldn't keep it up, after so many years of hating it and keeping it up anyway. I read and reread some of the writers who articulated feelings I have had about schooling, like John Holt and James Herndon. And I heard echoes of many a summer's end: walking into a bookstore or a library as if it were a candy store, glancing longingly at all the books I wanted to read, and knowing that school would take up all the time instead.

But now it is my time. I got up the courage to leave school when I began to feel the world beckoning to me. I wasn't just rejecting school now; I was embracing something else. When I had first imagined life without school, I couldn't think of anything else that I wanted to be involved in or realistically could be. But I actually spent a lot of time during that school year finding other things I wanted to do. Leaving only felt possible for me once I began see that there were real alternatives.

It was particularly helpful to me during that time to get to know adults who cared about what they were doing, people like Susannah Sheffer at GWS, and to think about those whom I already knew. Seeing people who had found "work worth doing," as John Holt called it, reassured me that this was a reasonable and possible goal. Finding out about the community of unschoolers of all ages was helpful too, because I felt less alone

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knowing that there is a considerable group of people out there whose lives are independent of school.

Even now, outside of school, I still don't always get to read as much as I'd like, but now it's only because I'm *choosing* to do something else. As an apprentice at a small New England farm last summer, I worked long, hard hours, got to know and care about the people I was working with, caught up on sleep whenever I had the chance, and didn't read much beyond organic farming journals. Now, working with a group that is trying to set up farms near New York City, planting bulbs in urban gardens, juggling, helping a friend with her food delivery business, helping a cousin with her Jewish after-school program, sitting in on geology lectures at Columbia University, helping my parents move to a new apartment, and staying in touch with far-flung friends, I don't have infinite time either, but I have managed to sit down with some good books, from Russian novels to treatises on geology.

I feel very lucky to have this time in my life, without many responsibilities, in which to learn about things I care about. I've found that most of the people I want to learn from don't care a bit about whether or not I'm in school or have a college degree and are happy that I'm interested in their work. When I called to offer my help to Just Food, an organization trying to promote community supported agriculture near New York City, they were mainly interested in my farming experience. They did ask me if I was in school, and I told them I was learning in a different way, by finding people who were doing work that I thought was important and trying to make myself helpful. I was plagiarizing from John Holt, but under the circumstances I didn't think he'd mind at all.

I'm considering the possibility that it might be useful to me someday to have that piece of paper that says I have been through college and that it would make my family feel more comfortable about my choices. I may hold out on moral grounds, though; one way to delegitimize unfair and ridiculous credentialing systems is to boycott them, and the reverse is also true – taking part in them lends them your tacit support. If I decide to get a degree I may try a program at the Regents College of the State University of New York, which I first read about in Holt's *Instead of Education*. This program gives college credit for taking all sorts of standardized tests. Since that happens to be one of the meaningless kinds of games I'm good at, I figure I might as well take advantage of it.

I would like to spend more time working on organic farms and in community supported agriculture programs where people pay a share of the farm budget at the beginning of the season, put in some volunteer time, and then get a share of fresh vegetables every week. Farming is a way of life I can see myself choosing.

Meanwhile, I'm trying to make up for lost time in my reading life. Recently, I've been jumping around from Tolstoy to George Eliot to Hardy to Flaubert. One writer I keep coming back to, though, is Henry Thoreau. I vividly remember sitting in a college dorm room, avoiding pressing schoolwork to read him and being struck by the force of a line from *Walden*: "Did you think you could kill time without injuring eternity?" ◆

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Resources & Recommendations

Each year we evaluate many more books than we can add to our catalog. When we like a book but decide against selling it (for any combination of reasons), we console ourselves by saying, "Well, we can at least tell readers about it." So here are some books about education which we pass along to you as recommendations (we'll have others about other topics in future issues). All descriptions are by Pat Farenga. Most of these books came out fairly recently, so check your local bookstore or library:

The Almanac Of Education Choices, ed. by Jerry Mintz. This is a revised paperback edition of the hardcover *Handbook of Alternative Education*. Less expensive, and with essays about alternative schooling as well as essays about homeschooling by Pat Montgomery and Cathy Duffy, this is a very useful resource for parents considering any form of alternative education.

The Art of Education, by Linda Dobson. Dobson is a homeschooling mother and columnist for *Home Education Magazine*. This book shows her ability to synthesize a wide range of materials about education and society. Dobson writes from the perspective of parent and taxpayer, and she is mad as hell about the things she sees taking place under the guise of educational professionalism, global economics, and advertising. What have these three things got to do with one another? Well, you're going to have to read this book to find out! A passionate call for parents to do much more than ship their kids off to school.

Parental Involvement and the Political Principle: Why the Existing Governance Structure of Schools Should Be Abolished, by Seymour Sarason. Not only is Dr. Sarason an astute observer of the governance problems plaguing education, he is also a good-humored and well-spoken advocate for individualizing children's education. Dr. Sarason stresses the importance of treating children (indeed, all people) with respect and consideration, both qualities that he finds lacking in school practice and governance. Buttressing his arguments with his experiences as a psychiatrist and professor at Yale, Dr. Sarason frequently arrives at positions John Holt and others have advocated, such as working with children's assets instead of their deficits when it comes to teaching.

Trust the Children: An Activity Guide for Homeschooling and Alternative Learning, by Anna Kealoha. This is a beautifully organized compendium of ideas and activities for homeschoolers, but also for anyone interested in working with children. It contains recipes for making art supplies (papier-maché, homemade paints, etc.) and other homemade learning toois, as well as suggestions for activities and books for learning music, letters, numbers, nature, biology, etc. Interesting marginalia about learning appear throughout the book.

Theory and Practice of Regressive Education, The Freethinkers' Pocket Guide to the Educational Universe, and **John Holt: Personalized Education and the Reconstruction Of Schooling**, all by Roland Meighan (avail. from Education Heretics Press, 113 Arundel Dr., Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ, England). Mr. Meighan writes concisely and passionately, pulling no punches in his disagreements with the status quo of institutions in today's society. His books are about the British education system, and they are not for the fainthearted since they seem designed to spark disagreement and controversy. As the U.S. trods down the path towards a nationalized and totally standardized school system, I am struck by reading in *Regressive Education* that Nazi Germany and Stalin's Russia made the same arguments we hear now in favor of national school standards, and that current day British education is in no less a mess than ours despite the implementation of national curricula and standards in 1988. Meighan's book about John Holt summarizes the thesis of each book; we hope this will inspire people to read Holt's actual books now that several are back in print. ◆

Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our complete 1996 Directory was published in GWS #108. Our Directory is not a list of all subscribers, but only of those *who ask to be listed*, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information - last name, full address, and so on. Tell us if you would rather have your phone number and town listed instead of your mailing address (we don't have space to list both).

If a Directory listing is followed by a **(H)**, the family is willing to host GWS travelers who make advance arrangements in writing.

If a name in a GWS story is followed by a state abbreviation in parentheses (e.g. "Jane Goldstein (MA) writes...") that person is in the Directory. If the name is followed by the entire state name (e.g. "Jane Goldstein of Massachusetts writes...") then that person is not in the Directory. We are happy to forward mail to those whose addresses are *not* in the Directory. If you want us to forward the letter without reading it, mark the *outside* of the envelope with writer's name/description and the issue number. If you want us to read the letter and then forward it, please enclose another stamped envelope.

When you send us an address change for a subscription, please remind us if you are in the Directory, so we can change it here, too.

Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used; if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

AK — Lenne MUSARRA (Aren/84, Sungie/87, Tim/90) 6729 Sherri St, Juneau 99801-9443

CA, North (zips 94000 & up) — Esther BARUCH & David BUTLER (Michael/81, Daniel/85, Shira/88) PO Box 329, Philo 95466 **(H)** ••• Jennifer BURKE & John BURGER (Silas/94) 1734 Buena Av, Berkeley 94703 **(H)**

CA, South (zips to 94000) — Anne & Ron CHRISTNER (Arielle/84, Adrien/86, Angelique/91) 629 Calle Palo Colorado, Santa Barbara 93105

HI — Michael CLARK (Eli/79, Rose/86, Nick/95) PO Box 1546, Keaau 96749 ••• Mili & Roland PECK (Christina/83, Matthew/85, Trevor/92) 105 Pulehu Nui Rd, Kula 97797

IL — Anita & Mark MOSHENROSE (Michael/78, Sara/87) 1412 N Ludlow, Olney 62450 **(H)**

IN — Meta SCOTT & Jeoffry BRENNICK (Ian/89) 1207 N New Jersey St, Indianapolis 46202

LA — Jim & Judith STARR-LASSEN (Christian/85, Martina/92, Suzanne-Marie/95) 1210 Calhoun St, New Orleans 70118

ME — Michele LeBLANC (Deana/86, Taj/92) Rt 1 Box 12A, Harborside 04642

MD — Anand & Susan MODAK (Mark/85, Johanna/89) 20610 Plum Creek Ct, Gaithersburg 20882 (change)

MA — Bruce & Heidi BACON (Anabel/91) Phillips Academy, Andover 01810 ••• Cynthia CARR-KRAMER & Peter KRAMER (Adam/81, Ethan/84) 12 Lakeview Dr, Greenfield 01301 ••• Perry & Gretchen DENNISTON (Laurel/76, Sky/80, Autumn/84) 49 S Ashburnham Rd, Westminster 01473 (change) ••• Susan & Alan FIGUEROA (Jared/77, Leigh-Ellen/80, Cynthia/83, Frank & Dominic/86) 11 Cook Hill Rd, Chester 01011 **(H)** ••• Kim & Todd KLIBANSKY

(Kelsey/90, Katherine/91) 47 Matthies St, Beverly 01915 ••• Maryam & Akiba MERMEY (Jamila/80, Raphael/87) 343 Depot Rd, Boxborough 01719 **(H)** ••• Kathleen O'KANE & Darren GARDNER (Nolan/87, Clara/91) 51 Pilgrm Dr, Northampton 01060

MO — Brian & Cherylee DUNCAN (Tyler/83, Cally/85) 5581 S Farm Rd 131, Brookline 65619 (change)

NV — Kathy & Bob RUNYAN (Bryan/89, Keith & Mark/92) 1036 B Tomahawk Tr, Incline Village 89451 **(H)**

NH — Grinnell & Linda MORE (Hannah/93) PO Box 270, Dublin 03444 **(H)**

NY — Jean HENDRICKS & Anthony SPANO (Kyle/91) 6955 Peconic Bay Blvd, Laurel 11948 **(H)** ••• Mike & Teri NIZIOL (Megan/87, Abby/89, Justin/92, Eric/94) 500 Nye Rd, Cortland 13045 ••• Tim & Fran PURCELL (Casey/82, Julie/85) Box 377, Clayton 13624

OR — Evelyn AVERY (Nichole/88, Michael/90) 3403 Edward Dr SE, Salem 97302

SC — Dean & Deborah WHITE (Sefanie/88, Aidan/90, Cathan/92) Home School Assoc of SC, 926 Bradford Av, James Island 39412 **(H)**

VT — Reed & Chris SIMS (Emily/86, Paul/89) General Del, Winooski 05404 (change) **(H)**

WA — Carl & Jane HANSON (Eli/74, Molly/78, Erik/85, Jason/88) 11028 Cowlitz Dr SE, Olympia 98501 **(H)**

Canada:

BC — Kate & Tim COSTIN (Geoffrey/85, Ben/88, Vanessa/92) 652 Oliver St, Victoria V8S 4W3 ••• Cynthia HAMILTON (Amy/89, Lydia/93) 18222 29A Av, Surrey V4P 1M6 **(H)** ••• Eva TRINCZEK & Geog STRATEMEYER (Yana/85, Ely/87, Miguel/90) 4876 Marshall Rd, RR 3, Duncan V9L 2X1 **(H)**

Sask — Sylvie ROY & Robert WRIGHT (Gabriel/86, Orion/89, Leilani/93) 3223 McCallum Av, Regina S4S 0R7 **(H)**

Other Locations — Gerry & Virginia de GROOT (Genevieve/72, Vanessa/73, Melinda/75, Rebecca/77, Adam/79, Gabrielle/81, Daniel/83, Anneliese/86, Philippa/88) PO Box 313, Deloraine, Tasmania, **Australia** 7304 **(H)** ••• Ursula HARLOS & Soubhi CHEBIB (Dania/83, Amar/86, Nadim/88, Lana/93) PO Box 819, Manama, **Bahrain** ••• Amy & Seiji UENARA (Ryoma/90, Mina/93) 2-12-302 Yagi-cho, Hachioji-shi, Tokyo, **Japan** ••• Penny & John VEITCH (Johnny/85, Jenny/89) Barravourich, Ramoyle, Dunblane, Perthshire FK15 0BD **Scotland (H)** ••• Rod & Kim WARK (Samuel/84, Matthew/87, Miriam/92, Abigail/95) 48 Langford Ln, Burley in Wharfedale, Ilkley, LS29 7EJ **England** (change)

Groups to add to the Directory of Organizations:

MD — Glen Burnie Home School Support Grp, c/o Whetzel, 6514 Dolphin Ct, Glen Burnie 21061

MA — Newburyport Area Homeschool Network, 32 Columbus Av, Newburyport 01950; 508-462-5680

OK — Home Educators Resource Organization of OK, c/o Chowning, PO Box 6792, Moore 73153-0729; 405-799-2158; email Nancy2468@AOL.com (statewide group supporting unschooling; has resource center and library)

VA — Northern VA/DC Metro group, c/o Compton, 12310 Streamvale Cir, Herndon 22070; 703-742-8597 ••• VA Home Education Assoc, Rt 1 Box 370, Gordonsville 22942; 540-832-3578; email vhea@virginia.edu

Address Changes:

AK — Sitka Home Educators, PO Box 1191, Sitka 99835

CA — California Homeschool Network, PO Box 44, Vineburg 95487-0044 800-327-5339; email CHNMAIL@aol.com

CO — Boulder Co. Home Educators, c/o Berg, 1495 Riverside, Boulder 80304; 303-449-5916 ••• Colorado Home Educators Assoc, 303-441-9938

OK — OK Christian Home Educators Assoc, PO Box 471363, Tulsa 74147

Lists of Resources

Once a year we print our complete lists of helpful teachers, lawyers, professors, psychologists, school districts, resource people, and grown homeschoolers. As with our Directory of Families, we print additions and changes to these lists throughout the year, so please continue to send them in. If you're sending us a change of address for a subscription, please let us know if you're on one of these lists so we can change it here, too. We're always interested to know whether people appreciate having this information available, so do let us know whether these lists are being used.

Certified Teachers

AK - Andy & Deb BYDLON, General Delivery, Big Lake AK 99652; 907-892-9012 (early childhood, elem., special ed.)

AZ - Kathleen M. KNEZ, Western Navajo Reservation, PO Box 889, Tuba City 86045; Special Ed

CA, South (zips to 94000) - Tutu ANDERSON, 6949 Fisk Av, San Diego 92122; 619-453-1086 ••• Karen BISHOP, N County Pl, 2204 El Camino Real, Suite 312, Oceanside 92054 ••• John BOSTON, 9942 Canyon Country Ln, Escondido 92026 ••• Michelle BUSH, 2374 Stonyvale Rd, Tujunga 91042; 818-951-7744 ••• Sandy DOERFEL, PO Box 301331, Escondido 92030 ••• Sarah LESLIE, 1846 N Edgemont #6, Los Angeles 90027; 213-662-5571

CA, North (zips 94000 & up) - Margaret ARIGHI, 6015 Mauritania Av, Oakland 94605; 415-653-5098 ••• Karen CANTO, 21023 Lynn Ln, Sonora 95370 ••• Marilyn DeVORE, 4273 Forbestown Rd, Oroville 95966 ••• Carol CRESTETTO, 29 Taft Ct, Novato 94947 ••• Jasmin GERER, 414 Emeline Av, Santa Cruz 95060; 408-423-8311 ••• Roy SHIMP, 2164 E Bellevue Rd, Merced 95340 ••• Cheryl STEVENS, 2486 Pebble Beach Loop, Lafayette 94549 (K-12, special ed) ••• Scott YOUNG, Charlotte's Web, 1207-F Bridgeway, Sausalito CA 94965; 415-332-2244

CO - Kara BERTHOLF, #1 Rd 6565 NBU4, Kirtland 87417 (certified in CO & NM) ••• Sandra GUENTHER, 2923 Sunset Dr, Golden 80401; English, Spanish, French

CT - Geoffrey SMITH, 365 Bellevue Rd, New Haven 06511; 203-787-5659; Eng, math, 7-12, admin

FL - Charlotte THIEN, 12201 Old Kings Rd, Jacksonville 32219; 904-768-0472 ••• Roger TRUNK, Rt 1 Box 110, Satsuma 32189; 904-649-4479

HI - Debbie KUKAHIKO, FAMILY ACADEMY, 72-3960 Hawaii Belt Rd, Kailua-Kona 96740

IL - Suzanne BALDWIN, 1452 Andover Dr, Aurora 60504; 708-851-0538 (K-12 music)

IA - Richard & Sharon CARGIN, 25 6th Av NE, LeMars 51031 ••• Rita EBELING, 324 Crescent Ln, Ft Madison 52627

IN - Marie DUSING, FAMILY ACADEMY, Rt 1 Box 509, Poland 47868; 812-986-2884

ME - Kathi KEARNEY, Box 69, New Sharon 04955; ME & VT K-12 ••• LouAnna PERKINS, Pierce Pond, RR-1 Box 22-C, Penobscot, ME 04476 (K-8) ••• Kristie SIMKO, PO Box 430, Mt Desert ME 04660 (elem.)

MD - Frances MOYER, 4017 William Ln, Bowie 20715

MA - George FOURNIER, RFD 2 Box 101, Brimfield 01010 (French) ••• Adele GARLICK, 96 Coolidge Cir, Northborough 01532 ••• George HECHT, 4 High Ledge Av, Wellesley 02181; 617-235-4246 ••• Thomas MAHER, 30 Park St, Wakefield 01880; 617-245-7634 ••• Faith Jones OZAN, 9 Tilehurst Ln, Marblehead 01945 ••• Mario PAGNONI, 76 Emsley Ter, Methuen 01844 ••• Denise STANLEY, 3 Athort Dr., Apt. 3, Woburn 01801; 617-932-9281 ••• Sharon TERRY, 23 Mountain St, Sharon 02067; 617-784-8006 ••• Linda ZUERN, Box 619, 5 Depot Rd, Cataumet 02534

MI - Kathy DONAHUE, Box 80-B S Superior Rd, Atlantic Mine 49905, K-12 ••• Bonnie MIESEL, 1111 Cricklewood SW, Wyoming 49509 ••• Dinah MORRISON, 76 Latta St, Battle Creek 49015, 7-12 ••• Muriel PALKO, 321 N William, Ludington 49431, K-12

MN - Jeanne BOURQUIN, 1568 McMaham Blvd, Ely 55731 ••• Linda WINSOR, 1927 James Ave, St Paul 55105

NH - Sally EMBER, 284 Water St, Keene 03431 (multicultural education)

NJ - Sandy MADKIFF, MINOTOLA ACTIVITY CTR, 207 Coan Av, Minotola 08341; 609-697-1643, K-12 Eng

NM - Kara BERTHOLF, #1 Rd 6565 NBU4, Kirtland 87417 (certified in CO & NM)

NY - Lyman BARRY, 9297 Shaw Rd, Nunda 14517; 716-468-2650; science ••• Diane CHODAN, RD 1 Box 462, Rome 13440 ••• Cheryl COONEY, 225 Rector Pl, 9R, NY NY 10280 (NY, NJ, MA) ••• Lucretia

ENTRY FORM FOR DIRECTORY

Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS.

Adults (first *and* last names):

Organization (only if address is same as family):

Children (names/birthyears):

Full address (Street, City, State, Zip):

Are you willing to host traveling GWS readers who make advance arrangements in writing? Yes ___ No ___

Are you in the 1996 Directory (GWS #108)? Yes ___ No ___
Or in the additions in this issue? Yes ___ No ___

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

GABRIEL, 12 Fairway Ct, Albany 12208; science ••• John Taylor GATTO, 235 W 76 St, New York NY 10023 ••• Joyce HOUCK, RR 1 Box 148A, Brant Lake 12815; 518-494-2072; elem. ••• Kathi KEARNEY, 1230 Amsterdam Av #604, New York 10027 ••• Martin MILLER, 3374 Aikens Rd, Watkins Glen 14891; math, sci, accounting ••• Jo MOBERLY, 149 S Main St, Naples 14512 ••• Natalie TATZ, 3320 Bainbridge Av, Bronx NY 10467; 212-654-7918 (elem)

OH - Linda CAMPBELL, 1862 Merganser Run Dr, Columbus 43215 ••• Elizabeth LOWER, 4875 Potomac Dr, Fairfield 45014 (Montessori) ••• Louann REBBIN-SHAW, 4412 Osborn Rd, Medway 45341; 513-873-8124

OR - Ann LAHRSON, 9025 SW 50th, Portland 97219; 503-244-9677 ••• Marilyn LOWE, 503-362-1203 (Spanish K-12, English 7-12) ••• Mary MAYFIELD, 24874 W Brush Creek Rd, Sweet Home 97386; 503-367-2474; 5-12 ••• Marcia SPANI, ALOHA KIDS ACADEMY, 4640 SW 182, Aloha 97007; 503-642-4094; K-8

PA - Diana BASEMAN, RD 3 Box 256 B, Tarentum 15084 ••• Debby BELL, 6 Royal Rd, Palmyra 17078; language ••• Kathy HOLLEGER, 3106 Swede Rd, Norristown 19401 ••• Rick KEPHART, 1 High St, Malvern 19355 (elem)

TX - Linda JONES, 3301 Hemlock, Temple 76504; elem

VA- Scott CHRISTIAN, Rt 5 Box 358, Martinsville 24112; 703-632-3780 ••• Mary FREED, 1825 W Grace St, Richmond VA 23220 (Montessori) ••• Suzanne STALLINGS, 301 Macon St, Lynchburg 24501-3221; 804-528-4585

VT - Jerry FRAIN, RR 1 Box 31, Walden 05873; 802-563-9947

WA - Mary COLES, 9255 36th SW, Seattle WA 98126 (reading & study skills)•••FAMILY ACADEMY (teachers all over WA state), 146 SW 153 Box 290, Seattle 98166; 206-246-9227 ••• Karen FOGLE, 14241 NE Wdnvl Duvall #243, Woodinville 98072; 206-481-2228 ••• Julie & David LOYD, General Delivery, Waldron 98297; (Julie: elem, Spanish, math; David: elem, high school, English, Spanish, Social Studies) ••• Tara SENNETT, 15506 19th Av, Tacoma 33445 ••• Denis WICHAR, Cascade Jr High School, 13900 NE 18th St, Vancouver 98684-7299; 256-6052

WI - Cheryl & Bruce BISHOP, 5148 Bluff Ct, Sturgeon Bay 54235; elem. ••• Alison McKEE, 5745 Bittersweet Pl, Madison 53705; elem, vis. impair

CANADA - Leslie AYRE-JASCHKE, 10409-101 St, Peace River AB T8S 1K7

ELSEWHERE- James A. PETRAIT, St. Joseph High School, Plot 3, Rt 2, Frederiksted, St. Croix, Virgin Islands 00840; school 809-772-0455, home 809-778-5761

Lawyers

CT - Frank Cochran, 51 Elm St, PO Box 1898, New Haven 06508-1898; 203-865-7380

FL - Charles Baron, 167th and NE 6th, NO. 815, N. Miami Beach 33160; 305-770-1410 ••• James R. Wells, 3837 Quail Ridge Dr, Boynton Beach 33436; 407-734-5068

HI - Tom DiGrazia, DiGrazia Law Office, PO Box 1780, Kailua 96734

ID - Lyle Eliasen, 202 Idaho St, American Falls 83211; 208-226-5138

IA - Craig Hastings, 315 6th St, Ames 50010; 515-232-2501

KS - Austin Kent Vincent, 2222 Pennsylvania Av, Topeka 66605; 913-234-0022

MD - Ray Fidler, 805 Tred Avon Rd, Baltimore 21212; 410-296-6495 ••• Paul Kimberger, 3905 Bexley Pl, Marlow Hghts 20746; 301-899-6933 ••• Dale R. Reid, 7091 Brangles Rd, Marriottsville 21104

MA - Eugene Burkart, 267 Moody St, Waltham 02154; 617-899-5337 ••• Susan Ostberg, 41 Warren Av, Harvard 01451; 508-456-8515

MI - Penelope Kozminski, 6650 Tanglewood SE, Grand Rapids 49546-7256; 616-942-4638 ••• Norm Perry, 8976 US 31, PO Box 241, Bernen Spgs 49103; 616-471-2848

NY - Seth Rockmuller, 29 Kinderhook St, Chatham 12037; 518-392-4277

OH - David A. Haffey, 3055 Rodenbeck Dr, Dayton 45432-2662 ••• James Peters, 107 W. Court St, Woodsfield 43793; 614-472-1681

OR - Kim Gordon, 6501 SW Macadam Av, Portland 97201; 503-452-9595

PA - Mark Semisch, 56 Warden Rd, Doylestown 18901

VA – Nancy LeSourd & George Grange II, 8280 Greensboro Dr, 7th Fl, McLean VA 22102

WI - Jack Umpleby, N96W18221 County Line Rd, Menomeonee Falls 53051-1300

WY - Gerald Mason, PO Box 785, Pinedale 82941; 307-367-2134 ••• William H. Twichell, PO Box 1219, Pinedale 82941; 307-367-2414

Professors & Other Allies

The following people are willing to help homeschooling families in developing curriculum, evaluating progress, or in other ways:

Larry Arnoldsen, Box 10 McKay Bldg, Brigham Young U, Provo UT 84602

Graham Ashworth, 423 Fox Chapel Rd, Pittsburgh PA 15238; 412-963-8800

Prof. Robert A. Carlson, College of Ed, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Canada S7N OWO

Sandy Doerfel, PO Box 301331, Escondido CA 92030

Juanita Haddad, Consultant in Free Range Learning and Deschooling, RR 7, Duncan BC V9L 4W4, Canada

Robert E. Kay, MD, PO Box C, Paoli PA 19301; 215-359-7885

J. Gary Knowles, Program in Educational Studies, School of Ed, U of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI 48109-1259

Michael Masny, 43 Burncoat St, Leicester MA 01524; 617-892-8012; certified school psychologist & social worker

Martin Miller, 3374 Aikens Rd, Watkins Glen NY 14891

Michael J. Murphy, Assoc. Prof., U. of Saskatchewan, College of Education, Saskatoon, Sask., Canada S7N 0W0

Dr. Robert Newman, Assoc Prof Emeritus, Teacher Education, Syracuse U, 137 Hughes Pl, Syracuse NY 13210

Seymour Papert, email papert@media.mit.edu

Sam B. Peavey, Ed.D., 2307 Tyler Ln, Louisville KY 40205; 502-459-2058

Edward Pino, 189 Antelope Tr, Parker CO 80134

Richard Prystowsky, Professor of English and Humanities, Irvine Valley College, 5500 Irvine Ctr Dr, Irvine CA 92720

Brian D. Ray, National Home Education Research Institute, Western Baptist College, 5000 Deer Park Dr SE, Salem OR 97301-9392

Mitchel Resnick, MIT Media Lab, 20 Ames St, Cambridge MA 02139, email mres@media.mit.edu

Jack Robertson, 532 Laguardia Pl #398, New York NY 10012-1428

Gary L. Stevens, University of San Francisco, 2486 Pebble Beach Loop, Lafayette CA 94549

Seymour Treiger, Ed.D., RR 3 Yellow Pt Rd, Ladysmith, BC V0R 2E0, Canada

Chester S. Williams, ETSU, Box 5518, Texarkana TX 75501; 214-838-5458

Psychologists

CA - Michelle Bush, 2374 Stonyvale Rd, Tujunga 91042 ••• Mary Ann Hutchison, 3409 Greenwood Av, Los Angeles 90066; 310-281-7711 ••• Hal Jindich, 191 E El Camino #307, Mountain 94040; 415-969-9981

MA - Michael Masny, 43 Burncoat St, Leicester 01524 (certified school psychologist and social worker) ••• Dr. Susan Ott, 110 N Main, Petersham 01366; 508-939-2161,e xt. 2205 ••• Paul Shafiroff, Ed.D., Director of Guidance, Southern Berkshire Regional School District, Sheffield 01257 ••• Dr. Paul Daniel Shea, 1450 Beacon St, Suite 801, Brookline 02146; 617-277-4214

NY - Emily Shapiro, 350 Central Park West, Suite 1F, New York NY 10025; 212-774-4156 (psychotherapy, counseling)

OH - Richard George, 1201 30th St NW, Canton 44709

PA - Dr. Bob Conroy, 1724 Smoky Corners Rd, Williamsport 17701 ••• Lawrence Kappan & Karen Lawson, 1004 Drexel Av, Drexel Hill PA 19026; 610-789-7325 (marital and family therapy)

TX - Steven Gutstein, PhD, One West Loop, Suite #215, Houston 77027; 713-621-7496

WA - Holy Family Institute, 43 Frontier Rd, Appleton WA 98602 (counselors)

CANADA - Jan Hunt, 132 Bullock Creek Rd., Salt Spring Island, BC, V8K 2L3

School Districts

The following is a list of school districts that are willingly and happily cooperating with homeschoolers, and who are willing to be listed in GWS as doing so. There are many more cooperative districts around the country than there are distncts on this list, and we have printed several stories in back issues of GWS about cooperation between schools and homeschoolers. If you are interested in seeing this material, place an order and ask us to send you back issues with material on this topic. Back issues are $3 each plus $3 per order for subscribers; $6 each for nonsubscribers.

Do bear in mind that not all states require homeschooling families to work with local school districts; in fact, many do not. Nonetheless, a cooperative school district may give homeschooling families access to events or materials even if they are not legally required to approve of or evaluate those families.

We only list school districts under the following conditions: (1) The family has to be not just satisfied but pleased with the cooperation the schools are giving to their homeschooling efforts. (2) The schools themselves have to be happy about being included in the list. If your district is cooperating with your homeschooling, and you would like them to be on this list, ask them, and let us know if they say to go ahead.

CA - Butte County Office of Education, 2120 B Robinson, Oroville CA 95965, James H. Scott, Principal, Home School Program

Lodi Unified School District, 835 W Lockford St, Lodi 95240; 209-369-7411; Don Shalvey, Asst. Supt. - Instruction K-12

Loma Prieta School District, 23800 Summit Rd, Los Gatos 95030; 408-353-2389; Dr. Kenneth Simpkins, Superintendent; Dr. Ruth Bothne, Independent Home Study Program Director

Marysville Joint Unified, 1919 B St, Marysville 95901

Monterey County Office of Education, 901 Blanco Circle, PO Box 80851, Salinas 93912; Bill LaPlante, Director of Alternative Programs

Mt Shasta Union School District, 601 E Alma St, Mt Shasta 96067; 916-926-3846; Carolyn Briody, Home School Coordinator

Santa Cruz City Schools, Alternative Family Education, 536 Palm St, Santa Cruz 95060; 408-429-3806; Attn: Terry Jones

FL - Student Services, Putnam Cty Schools, 200 S 7th, Palatka FL 32177; 904-329, 0538; contact John Milton, asst. Director

IL - Madison Junior High, Southern River Oak

Dr. Naperville 60565; Mr. Vergo, Principal.

Naperville Central High School, 44 W Aurora Av, Naperville 60540; Mr. Paulsen, Principal.

(note: these are individual schools, not school districts.)

MA - Chatham Public Schools, Chatham MA 02633; Supt. Vida R. Gavin.

Lowell School District, 89 Appleton, Lowell 01852; 454-5431; James McMahon, Asst. Supt. for Curriculum Development.

Rockland Public Schools, Rockland 02370; Supt. Ronald P. Gerhart.

Southern Berkshire Regional School District, Sheffield 01257; Director of Guidance, Paul Shafiroff; Thomas A. Consolati, Supt.

PA - Radnor Township School District, Administration Building, 135 S. Wayne Av, Wayne 19087; Dr. John A. DeFlaminis, Supt.

Resource People

The people listed below have experience with the following subjects and are willing to correspond with others who are interested. In many cases these subjects have been discussed in back issues of GWS, so if you are seeking information you can ask us to select the relevant back issues for you.

Adoption: Maureen Carey, 3 Fayette Park, Cambridge MA 02139 (adoptive nursing, transracial adoption) ••• Kathy Donahue, Box 80-B S. Superior Rd, RR 1, Atlantic Mine MI 49905 ••• Lenné Musarra, 6729 Sherri St, Juneau AK 99801-9443 ••• Tara Tieso-Battis, 1786 Rome Av, St Paul MN 55116-2424 (adoptive nursing, transracial adoption) ••• Reed & Chris Sims, 414 W Soledad Av #602, Agana, Guam 96910 ••• Jenny Wright, Quaker City, H.C. 60, Box 50, Charlestown NH 03603; 603-543-0910

Autism: Jill Whelan, 1714 E 51st St, Indianapolis IN 46205

Blindness: Donald & Kathy Klemp (son/75) N6479 Kroghville Rd, Waterloo WI 53594 ••• Ruth Matilsky, 109 S 4th Av, Highland Park NJ 08904 ••• Alison McKee, 5745 Bittersweet Pl, Madison WI 53705

Computers: Jack Loranger, MPO 17-R Krogstad Rd, Washougal WA 98671; 206-837-3760; "Electronic Educator" BBS #837-3299 ••• Mario Pagnoni, 76 Emsley Terr, Methuen MA 01844

Custody Disputes: Debbie Driscoll, 14503 SE 114th Pl, Renton WA 98059 (also single parents & gay & lesbian families) ••• Char Love, PO Box 2035, Guerneville CA 95446-2035. (We maintain a list of others with experience in this area who prefer not to list themselves publicly, and we will forward stamped letters to these people if asked.)

Down Syndrome: Elaine Bechtold, 10827 Rosedale Av N, Rt 1 Box 233, Loretto MN 55357-9793; 612-498-7553 ••• Rosemary Firstenberg, PO Box 25266, Seattle WA 98125 ••• Heidi Jarvis, N8373 Center Rd, Gleason WI 54435; 715-873-4050

Ham Radio: Sheryl Schuff, 8156 Lieber Rd, Indianapolis IN 46260; 317-259-4778

Learning Disabilities: ••• Pose M.R. Boggs, 6223 Geronimo Cir, Anchorage AK 99504----Kathy Donahue, Box 80-B S. Superior Rd, RR 1, Atlantic Mine MI 49905 ••• Rosemary Firstenberg, PO Box 25266, Seattle WA 98125 ••• Leslie McColgin, RR 1 Box 146, Cunningham KY 42035 (speech & language pathologist) ••• Cheryl & Gary Stevens, 2486 Pebble Beach Loop, Lafayette CA 94549 (Special Ed., Chemical Sensitivity)

Mental Illness - Jennifer Rozens, 33411 Jefferson Av, St Clair Shores MI 48082

Montessori: Gloria Harrison, Rd 11, Box 544, Greensburg PA 15601 ••• Elizabeth Lowen, 5928 Morningside Dr, Fairfield OH 45015

Physical Handicaps: Janna Books, Box 309-B, Route 2, Santa Fe NM 87505 ••• Myrna Clifford, 475 NE 200, Knob Noster MO 65336; 816-747-3080 ••• Kathy Donahue, Box 80-B S. Superior Rd, RR 1, Atlantic Mine MI 49905 ••• Karen Franklin, 3939 Winfield Rd, Boynton Bch FL 33436 (Jessica/80 C.P.) ••• Martin Miller, 3374 Aikens Rd, Watkins Glen NY 14891 ••• Lenné Musarra (see under Adoption) ••• Saunny Scott, 1901 Barker St, Lawrence KS 66044

Single Parents: Debbie Driscoll (see under Custody Disputes) ••• Janet Hoffman, PO Box 288, Hamburg PA 19526-0288 ••• Diane McNeil, 3131 Cty EE, Baileys Harbor WI 54202 ••• Laura Pritchard, 25607 98th Pl So, Apt K-102, Kent WA 98031 ••• Lisa Spector, 203-677-2852 ••• Karen Turner, PO Box 622, Redway CA 95560-0622 ••• Christine Willard, 2090 Pine Ave, Los Osos CA 93402

Traveling Families: Lois & Jim Blumenthal, 1132 Beechwood Dr, Hagerstown MD 21742-3007 ••• Louis & Jennifer Gordon (Katie/81, Patty/84) 10355 Grand Av, Bloomington MN 55420-5228 ••• Arlene Haight (Becky/68, Matt/73) 4150 So US #1, RD 2, Palm Bay FL 32905

Twins: Gloria Harrison, Rd 11, Box 544, Greensburg PA 15601

Grown-Up Homeschoolers

These former homeschoolers are now at college or involved in work, apprenticeships, or travel. The name of the college the student attends is usually evident from the address; if not, we have included it in parentheses. For those not in college, we have included a very brief description of what they are doing or have done. Where applicable, we have also listed the number of the GWS issue in which a more complete description of the person's experience was published. (Note: some former homeschoolers ask that their parents' address be used even though they are living elsewhere; in such cases, parents will forward the mail.)

Alazel Acheson, 2121 S Alaska, Tacoma WA 98405; 206-272-8124 (U. of Puget Sound; computer research and development)

Eleadan Acheson, 6575 S Simmons Dr, Clinton WA 98236; 206-341-7330 (teaching gymnastics; GWS #76)

Tia Acheson, 6575 S Simmons Dr, Clinton WA 98236; 206-341-7330 (School of Visual Concepts, Seattle)

Elye Alexander, RR 1 Box 795, Craftsbury Common VT 05827 (Harvard University)

Mylie Alrich, 405 Terrace Mt Dr, Austin TX 78746; 512-327-3888 (restaurant work, real estate)

Ben Barker, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (runs canoeing & mountaineering expeditions in MI and MT; attended Nat'l Outdoor Leadership School & Outward Bound; GWS #86, #93)

Britt Barker Mariner, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (runs Suzuki piano studios in WY and CO; writer; private pilot; GWS #56, #60, #93)

Dan Barker, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (cellist with Missoula Symphony Orchestra; outdoor leader; attended Interlochen Center for the Arts, Oberlin Conservatory; GWS #79, #84, #93)

Maggie Barker, 5221 Twp Rd 123, Millersburg OH 44654 (races sled dogs in North America & Europe; runs dogsledding programs in MI and MT; GWS #60, #81, #88, #91)

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, 314 Bryn Mawr Av, Bryn Mawr PA 19010; 610-527-4982 (University of Pennsylvania; library work; GWS #97)

Stephanie Bromfield, 1329 Blue Mtn Dr, Danielsville PA 18038; 215-767-3554 (community college; retail work)

Anne Brosnan, 173 Pioneer Dr, Richmond KY 40475 (bluegrass music, library work, newspaper editing; GWS #109)

Rebecca Cauthen, Shorter Coll. Campus Bx 293, 315 Shorter Av, Rome GA 30165-4298 (GWS #97)

Amber Clifford, 475 NE 200, Knob Noster MO 65336 (Central MO State U; GWS #97)

Jeff Cohen, 1499 S Lima, Aurora CO 80012 (US Air Force Academy; GWS #81, #93)

Tamara Cohen, 1499 S Lima St, Aurora CO 80012 (foreign exchange student)

Erin Dodd, PO Box 6366, Mars Hill College, Mars Hill NC 28754; 704-689-6379 (theatre, teaching)

Mike Dodd, 1648 Joe Hinton Rd, Knoxville TN 37931 (Boston University, University of Tennessee; GWS #71)

Leonie Edwards, PO Box 75, Harrisburg OR 97446 (dentistry)

Michelle Edwards, PO Box 392, Harrisburg OR 97446 (photographer)

Andrew Endsley, 213-874-8007 (film directing; GWS #77, #97)

Kendall Gelner, 7490 W Apache, Sedalia CO 80135 (Rice University, computer programming)

Laura Gelner, 7490 W Apache, Sedalia CO 80135 (Colorado College; GWS #89)

Anita Giesy, 1015 Redgate, Apt. A7, Norfolk VA 23507; 804-623-1031 (cross-country travel; dance; massage therapy; GWS #74)

Jeremiah Gingold, UC Santa Cruz - Kresge College, 600 Kresge Ct, Santa Cruz CA 95064; 408-471-5425

Tad Heuer, 164 Norfolk St, Holliston MA 01746 (Brown University; GWS #102)

Gordon Hubbell, Blvd Tsar Boris III No. 94, Sofia, Bulgaria (factory worker, LDS missionary)

Bronwyn Jackson, Wellesley College, 106 Central, Wellesley MA 02181-8298; 617-283-1000 (GWS #96)

Vanessa Keith, PO Box 145, E Hardwick VT 05836; 802-472-5115 (farm work, travel; GWS #89)

Celia Kendrick 40 Brook St, Rehoboth MA 02769 (Rhode Island School of Design; animation work; GWS #75, #82)

Kim Kopel, 5450 Bradbury Dr, St. Louis MO 63129 (intern at living history village; massage therapy; GWS #87, #99)

Ely Lester, PO Box 203, Joshua Tree CA 92252 (Rowland Heights Animation School)

Nathen Lester, PO Box 203, Joshua Tree CA 92252 (Mt. Shasta College - a recording engineering school)

Christian McKee, 5745 Bittersweet Pl, Madison WI 53705 (fly tying, teaching radio and German)

Christian Murphy, RD 6 Box 24, Wellsboro PA 16901 (Williams College; GWS #100)

Emily Murphy, 204 Prince George St, Annapolis MD 21401; 410-216-7926 (St. John's College; archivist work; GWS #89, #109)

Emily Ostberg, PO Box 246, Harvard MA 01451 (apprenticeship with medicinal plants in Belize; Pomona College; GWS #96)

Sarah Pitts, Boston College, Walsh 210, PO Box 9194, Chestnut Hill MA 02167-9194; 617-558-9357 (GWS #96)

Jesse Richman, RD 2 Box 117, Kittanning PA 16201 (U of Pittsburgh Honors College; GWS #109)

Emma Roberts, RR 1 Box 81, Jewell Hill Rd, Ashby MA 01431; 508-386-7084 (theatre, American Repertory Theatre school; GWS #73, #76)

Erin Roberts, 925 Huffmaster Rd, Knoxville MD 21758 (Bethany College; GWS #109)

Dawn Shuman, St. John's College, PO Box 2800, Annapolis MD 21404-2800 (GWS #100)

Lindsey Smith, 1800 Skyline Dr, Lincoln NE 68506 (NE Missouri State U, conservation work)

Seth Smith, 1800 Skyline Dr, Lincoln NE 68506 (NE Missouri State U, Central Methodist College, conservation & outdoor work)

Jacob Spicer, 7080 Leaches Crossing, Avoca WI 53506; 608-562-3969 (U. of Chicago, managing furniture store; GWS #89)

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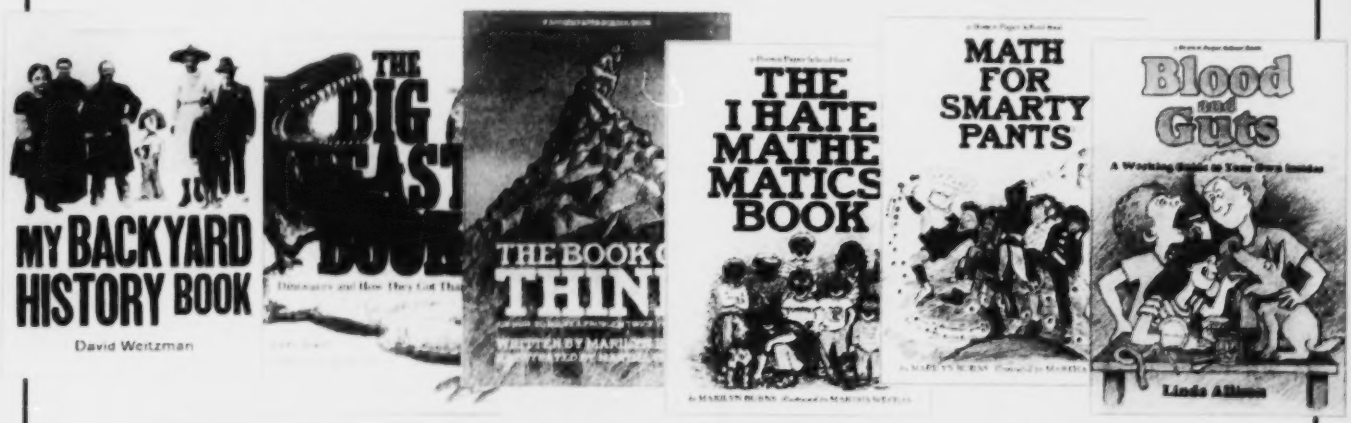

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Book Reviews

Why We Do What We Do: The Dynamics of Personal Autonomy
by Edward L. Deci. Hardcover. #3314 $24.95 + $4.50 s/h

Listen to this: "Parents, teachers, managers, doctors, coaches, and politicians are forever asking, 'How can I motivate people to behave themselves, perform well, act responsibly?' But that's the wrong question, because it starts from the wrong premise. They should be asking a profoundly different question: 'How can I create the conditions within which people will motivate themselves?'"

That's how Edward Deci sums up the subject of *Why We Do What We Do*, and it's a perfect summation of what we at GWS might say about education, or, for that matter, about work, human relationships, life in general. Last year, we were excited to discover that Alfie Kohn's book *Punished by Rewards* looked at what was wrong with trying to motivate people from the outside, and we were even more gratified to see that many homeschoolers were interested in the book and eager to discuss its implications. Now, those of you who found Kohn's book compelling have another equally thought-provoking treat in store. *Why We Do What We Do* looks closely at how people act in all sorts of situations and, like Kohn's book, it looks at the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. *Why We Do What We Do* is particularly rich in its discussion of the web of relationships among people and how we can be both autonomous – acting in accordance with our true selves and fueled by our own genuine motivation – while also supporting and being supported by the people in our lives. I predict that GWS readers will be quite interested in Deci's discussion of how we can allow others to make their own choices while still being involved in their lives in a caring way. After all, these are the issues that are at the heart of the unschooling philosophy, and although Deci may not have realized how relevant his topic would be to our audience, he's given us a wonderfully detailed and complex analysis of exactly the issues that concern us while also showing how people in other areas of life struggle with the same questions. He gives words to things you may have felt intuitively but hae not been able to express, he challenges you to think through what concepts like freedom, autonomy, choice, and support really mean, and he gives a great deal of evidence in support of the kinds of lives and ways of relating to one another that so many GWS readers are trying to achieve.

— Susannah Sheffer

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Issue #110
Apr./May '96

GWS

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By John Holt

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In this issue

In *Punished by Rewards*, Alfie Kohn writes, "... learning at its best is a result of sharing information and ideas, challenging someone else's interpretation and having to rethink your own, working on problems in a climate of social support." Kohn goes on to talk about classrooms that allow children to work in pairs or small groups, and he discusses the value of this kind of collaboration.

Critics of homeschooling sometimes say that homeschoolers are denied opportunities for learning through collaboration. We prove that false by printing story after story about homeschool science groups, writing clubs, book discussion groups, theater groups and about kids working with siblings and friends on all sorts of projects. We can reassure ourselves and others that homeschoolers have plenty of chances to collaborate with other kids. But homeschoolers have another important opportunity as well, and this opportunity may be *less* often available to children in school: the opportunity to collaborate with adults. I use the phrase to mean not simply learning from adults but actually working with them in genuine partnership.

For this issue's Focus, we asked homeschoolers to write about such collaborative experiences with adults, and their stories reveal what rich and mutually rewarding working relationships these young people have with the adults in their lives. Instead of seeing adults as people who tell you what to do, or even simply as people from whom they can learn, these young people are able to see adults as partners, as true co-workers. "We built the boat as a team," says Nathan Post of his work with his father. "We were learning *together*, not just the adults deciding everything and knowing everything." Amber Weller says of the farm produce business she and her parents created. And Sarah Mantell refers to the adult friend who helped her direct a play as a "co-director," rather than as a superior. In some cases the child came up with the idea and enlisted the adult's collaboration, in some cases it the other way around, and in some cases both adult and child conceived the idea. Either way, the benefits of working together were enormous.

In collaborative efforts between young people and adults, as in friendship across age lines, there's the potential to learn a great deal about how to value, and benefit from, different perspectives and abilities. Presumably when *any* two people collaborate, they appreciate the fact that they each have something different to contribute to the effort, but this is often especially apparent when the collaborators are children and adults. I love the picture that comes to my mind when I read about Amber and her parents brainstorming ideas for their business together, or the adults and kids in the Minnesota support group building compost boxes together, or Sarah and her co-director discussing ideas for their next rehearsal. I hope these stories will challenge you, as they've challenged me, to come up with your own ideas for genuine collaboration with young people. — Susannah Sheffer

News & Reports

Alternative for Drop-Outs

[SS:] In GWS #109, commenting on Colorado's proposed questioning of the compulsory school attendance law, I said that it would be interesting for people in the truancy- and drop-out-prevention fields to think about productive options for kids who aren't doing well in conventional schools. I was therefore interested to learn about a Boulder, Colorado group called Gateway Apprenticeship Program. They describe themselves as "a community service, created by educators, which offers young people alternatives in education that are relevant to their lives and interests. We listen to their needs, reach into the community, and find adults and businesses who are genuinely committed to working with young people; together we design appropriate curriculum which may be applied to a high school diploma. Gateway helps students explore their interests through any combination of independent study, mentorship, work-study, homeschooling, correspondence, and apprenticeship."

Particularly interesting to me was this description of a pilot study which Gateway is doing at the local high school:

"Kiersten is an example of both a high risk and a serious student. In the middle of a terrible family crisis, she dropped out of school at the end of her sophomore year and left home. Determined to receive a high school diploma, she began taking correspondence courses through Boulder High School. Gateway faculty met with her counselor and the principal to explore the possibility of apprenticeship for elective credit. The principal as well as the School Board are interested in apprenticeship education and have asked Gateway to use Kiersten as a pilot project. Gateway and Boulder High will work together to determine Kiersten's credit and to present the results of her apprenticeships to the larger community. Kiersten is apprenticing with a potter, an oil painter, and she is fulfilling a creative writing elective with two Gateway faculty. ... In addition to bringing meaning and life back into Kiersten's school experience, Gateway is also providing the means for her to receive the necessary elective credits she needs to graduate from Boulder High."

Misuse of Testing

From an article by Iris C. Rotberg in the December 1995 issue of Science:

In recent years, our expectations about what we can learn from testing students have become increasingly unrealistic. We use tests for inappropriate purposes and draw inaccurate conclusions from the results. To fix the perceived problem – low test scores – we administer more tests. In the process, we ignore real problems.

Testing has become an integral part of the public policy dialogue about major national issues. Scores on standardized tests are blamed for perceived failures in our economy and in international competition. They drive the debate on school reform. When educators express concern about the focus on standardized tests, we create new and, inevitably, more time-consuming tests that do not address the basic problem: Test score comparisons are highly misleading indicators of the quality of education and are irrelevant to decisions about the wisdom of any particular school reform.

... The international science and mathematics comparisons demonstrate the fallacy of equating test scores with school quality. ... The basic problem is student selectivity: The fewer the students who take the test, the higher the average score. That score is not a valid measure of the overall quality of the education system. It simply reflects the fact that the students represented in the test comparisons have been much more highly selected in some countries than in others.

... Myth: We can fix our schools by administering more tests. Or, if we hold teachers accountable for students' standardized test scores our schools will improve. The evidence shows the opposite.

Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives put it this way: "[Test-based accountability] has been tried many times over a period of centuries in numerous countries, and its track record is unimpressive. ... It was the linchpin of the educational reform movement of the 1980s, the failure of which provides much of the impetus for the current wave of reforms. ... Holding people accountable for performance on tests tends to narrow the curriculum. It inflates test scores, leading to phony accountability. It can have pernicious effects on instruction, such as substitution of cramming for teaching ..." [The footnote attributes this quotation to a report called *National Educational Standards and Testing: A Response to the Recommendation of the National Council on Education Standards and Testing*, published by the RAND corp, Santa Monica, CA, 1992.]

Legislative News

Controversy about legislation

Michigan: Since the three Michigan Supreme Court decisions in 1993, home schools in Michigan have been classified as nonpublic schools. Now a section of the "Revised School Code," signed into law in January, puts home schools explicitly into the public school code.

The bill, Senate Bill 679, was passed by both the Senate and the House over the Christmas holiday break and was then signed into law by the governor. The relevant section of the bill, section 1561 (3)(f), reads, "A child is not required to attend public school (if) ... the child is being educated by his or her parent or legal guardian at the child's home in an organized educational program ...".

The bill has caused controversy among homeschoolers in Michigan. Pat Montgomery of the Clonlara Home Based Education program writes in Clonlara's February newslet-

ter. "This bill has divided the home school community in Michigan. Both INCH (the Information Network of Christian Homes) and HSLDA (the Home School Legal Defense Association, a national group) favor it; almost all other home school groups and individuals oppose it. These include Christian Home Educators of Michigan, Jewish Home Educators, Islamic Home Educators, Clonlara, and many more."

Pat writes that those who oppose the bill believe it will increase the likelihood of home schools being regulated by local school boards. Pat argues that the "nonpublic school" designation was preferable and that legislation was not necessary. INCH's newsletter, on the other hand, said that the change "does not pose a threat to home educators. On the contrary, now ... home educators in Michigan [have] the greatest amount of freedom in the country." (INCH's newsletter was quoted in a January mailing from Clonlara.)

Though the bill has already been signed into law, it is not due to go into effect until July 1, 1996, and Pat writes that the legislators or the governor can still decide to remove the homeschool section. Clonlara has an automated telephone line with updates about this issue: 313-769-5655, ext. 804. See our Directory of Organizations in GWS #108 for other listings of Michigan groups.

Favorable changes to home education bill

Nova Scotia: Letters, calls, and visits from homeschoolers in Nova Scotia succeeded in making changes to the home education section of an education bill. Some of the changes, according to the Nova Scotia Home School Association newsletter, are:

(1) Homeschoolers are still required to register with the local school authority and to file reports, but they don't have to seek approval prior to beginning homeschooling, as the bill had originally proposed; (2) The language of the law now says that homeschooling must be provided under the "direction" of the parent, so that tutors, grandparents, and other adults can be involved; (3) Testing, which had been mandatory in the original wording of the bill, is now one of three options. The Minister of Education has the right to require evidence of the child's educational progress, but this can be in the form of standardized test results, an assessment from a qualified assessor, or a portfolio of the child's work, *and the choice is up to the parent.*

Finally, the Minister of Education's right to terminate a homeschooling program is now considerably more limited. As homeschoolers comment in the NSHEA newsletter, "Before a Minister can terminate a home education program, he must appoint an independent investigator who will determine not only the child's educational progress, but whether the parents are addressing any weaknesses, and whether the public school would do any better. These requirements practically eliminate the possibility of termination carried out on a whim or without just cause."

Bill to lower compulsory school age defeated

Washington: Two bills which would have lowered Washington's compulsory school entrance age from 8 to 6 died after hearings in late January and early February. If the compulsory age had been lowered, homeschoolers, as well, would have been required to fill their annual declarations of intent by the time the child was 6, so homeschoolers were chief among those opposing the bills. Wendy Wartes of the Washington Homeschool Organization told us that this is the third time in ten years that such a change has been proposed, because Washington and Pennsylvania are the only two states to have a compulsory entrance age of 8.

In Memoriam: Donn Reed

We are sorry to report that Donn Reed, author of *The Home School Source Book*, died of cancer on December 21, 1995. His wife, Jean Reed, says that he had been battling cancer since 1986 and that "he worked hard to do everything possible to fight the disease and despised it when it intruded into our daily lives and the work he wanted to do." We extend our sympathies to Donn's family. Jean plans to continue the services of Brook Farm Books (the Reeds' publishing company) and will complete the work on a third edition of *The Home School Source Book*. This book was first published in 1991 (and before that Donn did a similar book called *The First Home School Catalog*), and, as Jean reports, it went on to have world-wide sales and acclaim. The book is available from us here; it and other books are available from Brook Farm Books, PO Box 246, Bridgewater ME 04735.

Office News

[SS:] Spring is homeschooling conference season, and if you look at the Calendar (below) you'll see that we'll be at many conferences and events around the country. We look forward to seeing many of you.

Thanks to Maureen Carey's determined efforts to track down distributors, copies of GWS can now be found in food co-ops and some bookstores in the Boston metro area, the New York metro area, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and Los Angeles. If you live in one of these areas and you meet someone who wants to look at a single copy of the magazine before subscribing, you can direct them to these shops instead of having to lend out your own copy. We'll keep you posted as other distributors come on board.

Randi Kelly, our subscription manager, has been ill with mononucleosis and out of the office since mid-January. Other staff have done a great job keeping up with most of her work, but some subscribers may have experienced processing delays, and we apologize. Do let us know if there are any subscription problems that still need to be resolved.

We love when readers use GWS to help and support one another, and the responses to "Mother Under Stress" in GWS #108 were a great example of this. We can't forward letters if we have to bear the additional postage costs, though, so here's a reminder of the options you have when you want to respond to a GWS writer:

(1) If you simply want to write a letter to someone without having us read it or consider it for publication, first check the GWS Directory in GWS

#108 and the additions in subsequent issues. If the address is there, you can write directly. If the address isn't there, address the envelope to the person's name, c/o GWS, and send it to us. We'll cross out our address and write in the recipient's address; the post office allows first class mail to be forwarded once at no extra charge.

(2) If you want us to read the letter and/or consider it for publication, and you *also* want a copy to be forwarded to the original writer, you can put your letter in a *stamped, unsealed* envelope, and then put that in another envelope to us, with a note saying something like, "Please forward this to so-and-so. It's also OK to read and publish it."

(3) Though we won't insist on it, if it's possible for you to send two copies of your letter so that we can easily keep one and forward the other, we'll be grateful, as that saves us photocopying time and expense. Thanks very much!

Calendar

A • designates events where someone from Holt Associates will be speaking.

Apr. 19-20, 1996: Harvest Home Educators Curriculum Fair in Lawrenceville, GA. Workshops, speakers, and vendors. For info: Harvest Home Educators, PO Box 1756, Buford GA 30518; 770-455-0449.

• Apr. 28: California Home-Education conference in Anaheim, CA. Pat Farenga will be speaking; materials from John Holt's Bookstore will be available. For info: Barbara David, 916-391-4942.

May 3-4: Wisconsin Parents Assoc. 13th annual conference on home education at the University Center of UW-Stevens Point. For info: WPA, PO Box 2502, Madison WI 53701; Melissa Rice 715-341-6378.

May 4: Pennsylvania Home Education Network's first annual conference and curriculum fair at Geneva College in Beaver Falls, PA. Pat Montgomery and others speaking. For info: Clark Echols, 980 Sarver Rd, Sarver PA 16055; 412-353-2246.

• May 4-5: Hollingworth Center for the Gifted conference at MIT, Cambridge, MA. Pat Farenga speaking; Susannah Sheffer conducting writing workshop for kids; books available. For info: Theta Torbert, 207-549-3149.

May 10-11: B.E.A.C.H. Tidewater VA Homeschool Curriculum and Book Fair at VA Beach Book Pavilion. For info: 804-474-0389.

• May 17-18: Homeschool and Family Learning Conference in Boxborough, MA. Includes Holt Associates workshops on unschooling, Pat Farenga speaking, materials from John Holt's Bookstore, many other speakers and vendors. For info: 207-657-2800.

May 17-19: Nat'l Homeschool Assoc. conference for teens at YMCA Camp Ernst in Burlington, KY. For info: NHAT Inquiries, 1395 Lake Allyn Rd, Batavia OH 45103; 513-732-6355.

• June 6: NJ Unschoolers Network conference at Brookdale Community College. Workshops by Pat Farenga; materials available. For info: Nancy Plent, 908-938-2473.

Jun. 7-9: Washington Homeshool Organization's 11th annual convention at the U. of Puget Sound in Takoma, WA. Speakers Grace Llewellyn and Thomas Armstrong, workshops, curriculum fair. For info: WHO, 18130 Midvale Av N, Ste C, Seattle WA 98133; 206-546-9483.

Jul. 12-13: Sixth annual Nat'l Assoc. of Catholic Home Educators conference in Manassas, VA. For info: Rachel Watkins, 410-254-9390. For info about regional Catholic homeschoolers conferences, write NACHE, PO Box 420225, San Diego CA 92142.

• June 15: "Perspectives on Adolescent Girls" conference, part of the Nat'l Women's Studies Association conference at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY. Susannah Sheffer will give a presentation on "What We Can Learn from Homeschooled Girls." For info: Loretta Younger, 301-403-0524; NWSA@umail.umd.edu.

• June 22: Susannah Sheffer speaking to homeschoolers in Burlington, VT. Materials from bookstore available. For info: Deb Shell, 802-524-9645

• Aug. 24-27: California Home-Education conference in Sacramento. For info: Barbara David, 916-391-4942.

Aug. 24-30: First annual Not Back to School Camp for people aged 12-18, hosted by Grace Llewellyn. For detailed info, send $1 to PO Box 1014, Eugene OR 97440. ◆

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African-American Homeschoolers

***Freedom Challenge*, an exciting new book edited by Grace Llewellyn, brings together the voices of African-American homeschoolers for the first time in book form. These voices lend a new perspective and challenge some of the stereotypes associated with homeschoolers. Below is an interview with one of the book's writers, Donna Nichols-White, who is also the editor of *The Drinking Gourd: A Multicultural Home Education Magazine*.**

Do you think that homeschooling is growing in the African-American community?

I work with the National Black Child Development Institute, and I give workshops at their conventions. I am usually the only Black person in the place who knows about homeschooling. But gradually the word is getting around. I think for a long time, Black families homeschooled underground. People are coming out from under cover, but it's often very hard to explain homeschooling to people in the Black community.

Why is it hard?

Historically, we fought to get *into* the schools, so the idea of our fighting to get out of schools doesn't make sense to a lot of people. As a people, our introduction to education in this country was no education at all; it was illegal to make us literate. Many people today are still influenced by *Brown v. Board of Education*, which was about trying to get an equal education alongside "our fellow Americans," so to speak! So to come to homeschooling from that perspective, the perspective that says, now some of us would like the choice *not* to go to school, is very different.

So how do you explain the homeschooling perspective to people who feel, as you describe, that homeschooling is undoing all the previous efforts at integration?

Well, I try not to argue. But the thing is, when Black people see a child doing well in school, they often think that the child is doing well because he went to this preschool and that particular public school and so on. They think that if they can get their child into the same school, their child will do well, too. They may not recognize that what's important is the kind of life the child is having outside of school. The affluent, white child they see doing very well in school is probably having a very different kind of experience outside of school too.

People also don't realize that the original intent of schools was never to educate people equally. In an article in the *Seattle Times* recently, a school superintendent admitted that the original intent of schooling was to prepare most kids for the menial jobs that were available. I think parents play into that today when they send their kids to school and say, "When you grow up, you're going to have to listen to a boss, you're going to have to punch a time clock." What about saying, "When you grow up, you're going to run your own life?" As a community, Black people have never been encouraged to be independent and run our own businesses.

But you know, plenty of Black people actually were homeschooled. Most of our grandparents had only eighth grade educations, if that. In that sense, homeschooling is actually an extension of what we've always done, because the schools have never really provided everything for Black children. But homeschooling goes against the public perception of what we *should* be doing.

I also say that I have to make decisions that are best for my family. If you cannot tell me something that would truly help my child in school, then don't try to argue with me about homeschooling.

What do you think are the particular benefits of homeschooling for Black families?

That you grow into independence. My parents were always active politically within the Black community, but never did we have the political power that I see within the homeschooling community today. Being part of the political process as a homeschooler has been enlightening to me.

And for me, a big benefit is that through homeschooling we're able to focus on the family, which, historically, we were not allowed to do.

It's funny – in the white community, it's usually the mother who is pushing the idea of homeschooling, but in the Black community, it's often the dads, because schooling has often had more detrimental effects on them. They remember their own childhoods. When I began homeschooling, my first thought was just to protect my son.

Are there any particular challenges to homeschooling as a Black family?

People think that the authorities might be harder on Black homeschoolers, but I've found that the opposite is true. I've never heard of an official bothering a Black homeschooler; it's almost as if they don't consider it as important if we do it. But one challenge you might not think of is that we often come from families of teachers – that was often the only job our parents could get – so we have to convince our relatives about homeschooling. Another challenge is that in some parts of the country, Black families have told me that they've gone to support group meetings and been snubbed. In that case, forming an all-Black group might be a productive thing to do, a way of being independent. For me, I got lucky because the first group I picked was inclusive, and I've never felt the need for a Black-only group.

Grace talks about one challenge in the introduction to the book. She mentions Michael, a high school student she met years ago who told her that he could never homeschool because if he ever applied for a job and didn't have a diploma, he felt the employer would just look at him as a stereotypical dropout. He was saying that since there's already so much prejudice against him, he couldn't risk doing something different.

But a diploma for a Black person, or for anyone, doesn't guarantee a job anyway. It's true that a lot of Black homeschoolers won't completely unschool, and I think that comes from a fear of really ruining our children. I don't think, as some do, that Black homeschoolers have to be more academically advanced just to prove something; I think it's more important for our kids to be independent and responsible for their own actions and their own learning. It's difficult to define what responsibility for learning is, but if kids aren't self-motivated early on, it's hard to introduce it later. On the other hand, what the Black community can teach the white homeschooling community is that there can be a middle ground between unschooling and structured schooling.

Can you succeed at explaining homeschooling to someone like Michael, or to other kids in school?

I talk to parents of school kids about how to make their homes into places of learning and how to make the home the number one environment even if the kids are in school during the day. Most parents don't know what an advantage it is to have books in the home, for example, or to let the kids explore. I tell them to go to Good Will and buy some used appliances and let your kids take them apart. In other words, regardless of your economic status, you can offer your kids important opportunities. Often, the poorer the parents are, the less they feel they can offer their children. I'm trying to get them out of that mindset. These are people whose chances of actually homeschooling are very slim, but I'm still trying to give them some hope and let them know what they can do for their children. I go in as a parent-educator, and I don't focus on the fact that I'm homeschooling, but I'm secretly hoping that once they realize how much power they have within their homes, they won't need to send their kids to school anymore!

What was your reason for starting The Drinking Gourd?

In homeschooling publications, you usually only heard one or two perspectives, and we had other perspectives we wanted to cover. For example, there are a lot of families in the group who are white parents with adopted Black children. They became a Black family, in a way, and were stunned at the amount of prejudice in this country. They hadn't realized it until, say, their Black teenager was in the supermarket and was followed by the security guard. So I wanted to have a place to talk about these things. And through my catalog I wanted to offer a mix of multicultural materials and good math and science materials. When you go to homeschooling conventions, you usually see only one kind of history in the materials available. I don't have a specific plan to enlighten people about other cultures, but I do want that information to be available. My emphasis is toward a more informed and literate society. My emphasis is also on independent learning, because I know, from the start, that most of what I had learned in my life, I had taught myself.

For more information on The Drinking Gourd Multi-Cultural Home Education Magazine *and book catalog: PO Box 2557, Redmond WA 98073; 1-800-836-0336.*

Freedom Challenge *is available from Holt Associates for* $16.95 + $4.50 s/h ◆

From Grace Llewellyn's introduction to *Freedom Challenge*.

... Many black people homeschool to save themselves from a system which limits and destroys them, to reclaim their own lives, families, and culture, *to create for themselves something very different from conventional schooling.*

... All a parent really needs to homeschool successfully, as an African American father pointed out to me, is the motivation of love. ... Of course it helps – not just for homeschooling, but for all of life – to have (or build) a strong community. Maya Gounard learns not only from her parents, but also from numerous other adults who live in her houseboat neighborhood. The Cloughs' neighbors built a barn for them, and Adam Clough helped; later, when those neighbors moved to Costa Rica, they invited Adam to come stay with them. Sunshine Lewis and her brothers learn about astronomy, Spanish, architecture, and chess from adult friends of their family. Erin Tackoor has special lessons with her aunt once a week. Detra Rose Hood has worked with other African American homeschooling families – despite their ideological differences – to set up science classes taught by volunteer experts, which her son Tunu enjoys.

... The problem with all this comes at the beginning: that gate into the land of homeschooling, which many people perceive as narrow and formidable. ... [W]orking class families without college backgrounds often lack the confidence to walk through the gate in the first place. School officials, relatives, spouses, even children can shatter frail hopes when they accuse: "You? Homeschool your kids? Didn't you drop out of high school? Don't you remember how badly you did in history and science? You never even took algebra! Your spelling is atrocious!" Often, I believe, parents who would have no trouble with the real work of homeschooling never even consider it as an option, simply because they've been thoroughly indoctrinated by the school system to believe that A) they are stupid, and B) without academic success, they have no business homeschooling their own children. The sooner these lies are blasted and the vicious cycle halted, the smarter and happier this world will become.

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Challenges & Concerns

Homeschooling Disputed in Divorce

A reader writes:

I am a homeschooling single mother in the process of getting divorced and am looking for support, advice, and stories from other mothers who have been in this situation. My ex-husband would like to send the kids to school because he thinks they spend too much time with me, that I overprotect them and have too much influence on them. The children, aged 9 and 6, are clear that they want to continue to homeschool, and we have been very content with our homeschooling lifestyle. I also run a small daycare business which we all participate in and enjoy. A lot of learning has taken place as my children have helped to care for two toddlers whom we started caring for as infants. Another reason that my ex-husband would like to send the children to school is so that I can get a full-time job and free him from any child support, as he proposes a joint custody situation.

We are in the middle of litigation and have been to court once for temporary orders, as he had threatened to cut back on child support payments. The judge ordered him to continue to pay the same amount but also gave us temporary joint custody. My ex-husband proceeded to arrange for my older child to have a core evaluation, which involves 6-8 hours of testing, because he considers him to be below grade level in reading, writing, and math. My son has begun this testing and has about three more sessions to go. He is a bright and creative child who happens to be a late reader and writer. He would have been labeled if he were in school and probably his self-esteem would have suffered.

I have been reading a lot about how to help children of divorce, and much of what is clear is that they do much better when their parents can cooperate and learn to make decisions together (when the decisions have to do with the children). I can see that going through the courts only creates greater rifts and hostility. We had tried mediation but failed because we have such big differences and the history of verbal abuse that had punctuated our relationship did not end with our separation. I really wanted out.

Now I'm wondering if there are any pieces of this that I should give in to for the sake of the children. They will hurt if they go to school but they are also hurting to see their parents unable to be friendly with each other. I love homeschooling and feel that it has helped them get through this difficult time more easily than if they had been in school. But kids do survive school and I don't know how well they survive divorce.

Another factor is that I am British (my ex-husband is American) and I would love to be able to think about the possibility of moving back to England, but I cannot even leave the state without his permission, so I feel very stuck and often lonely, cut off from my oldest friends and family.

If anyone has any thoughts or experiences that might help me in this struggle, I would love to hear from them.

Death in the Family

Cheryl Sauter (VT) writes:

In GWS #98 and #102, I read people's top ten reasons for homeschooling. I remember thinking at the time that it would be a difficult task narrowing down my list to ten reasons. It seems every day some little thing comes up reminding me of how glad I am that we homeschool. I am continually adding to my mental list.

If you had told me that at some point I would be putting "death" on that list, I probably would have looked at you a bit strangely. But not only have I added that to my list, but for about six months it was at the top of my list.

A year ago my father died. Six months prior to that he received the diagnosis of cancer. So began the roller coaster familiar to anyone caring for someone with a life-threatening disease.

It began in the summer, when children are *allowed* out in the world. I didn't, at first, see the benefit of homeschooling. But as fall came and the cancer, the chemotherapy, and the need for help intensified, we were able to increase the time devoted to helping care for my father. Eventually we spent the last three weeks of my father's life living with him and caring for him. This would never have been possible if my children were enrolled in school.

A friend of mine mentioned that homeschooling and homebirthing blend nicely together. Birth is such a natural part of life; she wanted her older children to share in the experience. I feel the same way about death. Though it is a very difficult and a very sad thing, it is most certainly a natural part of life and one too often hidden from children (to say nothing of life in general). I feel very fortunate to have been able to help care for my father at home (which was his wish) in his final days. And I have to believe that when my children made pictures to hang up for him to look at when he could only lie in bed, or when they popped in and out of his room to give him a hug or to make him laugh, his final days were made better.

Another benefit of all this (and not a small one, I might add) is that my mother is now a strong supporter of our homeschooling. Prior to this she was quite opposed to it. She now jokes that even if she wanted to criticize our homeschooling, she wouldn't dare after all the help we were able to give her by dropping everything to come help care for my father. But I believe it goes beyond that for her. She was able to spend a lot of time with her grandchildren; she saw how helpful they can be. Although by academic standards very little was accomplished in those months, I know the children grew in immeasurable ways. My mother also now sees that

they are doing just fine academically despite several months "off." (This makes it sound as if we usually hit the textbooks. We don't, though I do have to admit that the usual free flowing science projects, art projects, etc. didn't happen either with all the disruption in our lives.)

Since my father's death, we have been able to spend a lot of time with my mother, helping her (and us) adjust to the loss. This too we would not be able to do so readily if the kids were enrolled in school. Having children about, rather than stuck away in school, is a wonderful thing when facing serious illness and even death. The energy and optimism of youth somehow counterbalances the despair and sadness felt at these times.

Although I hope it will be a long time before "death" again tops my list of benefits of homeschooling, I am comforted by the fact that if it does, we will have the freedom to be there when we are needed.

How Does Homeschooling Affect Parents' Marriage?

Patricia Schuyer Norton of West Virginia writes:

Our children are 1 and almost 4 and we have been seriously considering homeschooling for several years. I have read extensively about homeschooling, with a bias toward "unschooling" material. My husband and I have a growing concern about homeschooling that I have not heard addressed clearly yet.

The concern is the effect of homeschooling on our marriage. We are at least 20 minutes' drive from the nearest homeschooling family, so we would be homeschooling in some isolation. I guess our concern comes from looking at older couples and noticing that the couples who have retained a loving relationship – not just retained, but built, and are growing within their caring for each other – have put their relationship at a very high priority in their lives. Perhaps it is because our children are currently so young, but I know that much of my emotional energy is invested in them during their waking hours. And when they sleep, I'm often too tired to "be there" for Tom. He is extremely helpful and supportive and patient through all this; however, I know that I am not able to give as much time or energy to him right now (let alone the house or the garden or the sheep!) as I would like.

I wonder whether this stays true when one homeschools older children. Obviously each couple is quite different in how they well they handle the additional stresses of homeschooling and the potential isolation. I guess I am sometimes afraid that my sense of individuality – my sense of ME, which is the best gift I can bring to our marriage – gets swallowed up by the intensity of my relationship with the children. I can imagine that when children are away from home 6-7 hours a day, I might be able to recharge myself better than if we were homeschooling. On the other hand, I can also imagine that their needs, when home from school, would be far more pressing in the evening than they might be if I were with them all day.

Much of the time, I feel enriched by learning with my children. It is fascinating to watch them approach the world. I have learned tremendously from them already and I can be very excited about what is yet to come. It is true, however, that I use up a lot of my intensity and focus on them and I have yet to figure out how to save some of that for Tom. I do not wish to sacrifice our relationship by making the choice of homeschooling; I feel strongly that the best gift we can give our children is the security of growing up under the shelter of a warm and loving marriage. While I know that the choice of schooling is not the only factor in a marriage, it seems to me that homeschooling does intensify the mother/child relationship, and I would like to hear about how couples have handled it.

Even as I write this, I see that it is an impossible query, the complexity of a marital relationship being such that each couple has to evolve unique answers. Likewise, the complexity of being a family is going to have to be something we resolve for ourselves. Still, I guess I would appreciate some assurances that it is at least possible to

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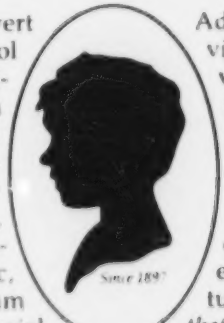

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be happily married and homeschooling; perhaps advice on how to avoid being swallowed up as the primary homeschooling parent would be helpful too.

More Responses to Mother Under Stress

From Priscilla Young Colletto (NY):

In response to "Mother Under Stress" in GWS #108, I too tried to follow the PET (Parent Effectiveness Training) model of non-coercive parenting when my daughter was young. Like you, I was often disappointed with my daughter's belligerent behavior and my own response. I now realize that I had developed a self-sacrificing model of motherhood. My mothering style was strongly influenced by La Leche League, GWS, and Jean Liedloff's book, *The Continuum Concept*. None of these sources advocates self-sacrifice on the part of the mother; rather, they advocate awareness and sensitivity to the child's needs. But I, in my urgency to be the very best of parents, had become so centered on my child's needs that I failed to give equal respect to my own needs. My child was running my day, my life, and I felt enslaved.

I think the challenge mothers face today—in simultaneously meeting both their own needs and their children's, may be more difficult in some ways than it was for our foremothers. Our culture has strayed so far from our evolutionary past. We no longer live in tribal settings with their built-in network of parenting support. The leap from the tribal culture Jean describes in *The Continuum Concept* to our corporate-dominated industrial culture is a big one. No longer is the family's work centered around the home. Most of the children in our neighborhoods are locked up within the confines of school each day. The other parents in the neighborhood may leave each day to commute to outside employment. Extended family may be far away. Mothers have become increasingly isolated at home. For rural mothers especially, the costs of getting out and connecting with others may conflict with the need for economy that comes with giving priority to being available to the children.

So I think that many mothers today do feel caught between wanting to be available to our children and wanting to be out with other adults, actively living an adult-focused life. Unfortunately, schooling and daycare are our society's answers to this conflict, and those of us who choose not to abandon our children on a daily basis to institutional settings are challenged at times by the isolation of our homes.

Mothers are the ones who most keenly feel the conflicting messages, "Be there for your children, they need you" and "Have a career, earn a paycheck, and be successful." I recommend *The Myth of the Bad Mother: Parenting without Guilt*, by Jane Swigart, Ph.D. She explores the emotional realities of motherhood. As a therapist, she has found that many women secretly feel they are failing to be a good mother. She looks at how our culture both idealizes and devalues the mother's role. She asks the question, what do years of nurturing others, without being adequately nurtured ourselves, do to women? Isn't it time, she asks, to look beyond the woman herself to the failure of the society around her to help and support her in the work of rearing the children? This is a powerful book, and at the very least, it helped me to offer myself a dose of compassion rather than blame. It helped me see that it was understandable that I struggled emotionally at times and helped me to accept and embrace my feelings so that I could begin to move forward.

I have found that being clear that I am in charge of my life and the flow of my day, that I needn't focus on my child, and that I can, as PET advocates, let my child own her own problems, has helped me as a parent. I still struggle at times, I have for the most part been a single parent, and my only child seems to have a constant need for playmates. I find that I have as great a need for her playmates as does she, for they absorb her constant energy and strong desire for attention. When I am her only source of company, I feel challenged and fatigued.

I can also see that I have my own set of problems to resolve: that I too am bored at times. That it is difficult to find and maintain the right balance of adult social contact. That I have a need for meaningful work beyond parenting and housework, but that I am confused as to how to be an available homeschooling mother and engage myself in the world of work at the same time. The question of how to find the childcare I would need to work, without burdening others, confuses me. I don't want to add to another women's oppression in order to gain my own measure of freedom (childcare providers are so often underpaid and overworked women).

I encourage Mother Under Stress to do whatever it is she needs to do to meet her own needs, for if the primary caretaker's needs are not met, the well-being of the whole family is jeopardized.

From Penny Barker (OH):

It was neat to read in GWS #109 the many supportive ideas that homeschooling parents had for "Mother Under Stress." I agreed with everything that the writers said to her. I also felt there was something missing and that that omission could make Mother Under Stress feel panicky, backed against the success/failure wall.

No one mentioned that, yes, maybe in some circumstnaces, it would be better for a 6-year-old to be in a school classroom than home with an angry, irritable, short-tempered mom. If, after working with the ideas offered by people, Mother Under Stress is not feeling any happier and more patient, perhaps the school classroom would be a psychologically safer space for her child. I feel that Mother Under Stress needs to feel that this is acceptable, albeit not *our* choice. It is so easy to forget that what began for us as an experimental choice is not the only one. It is especially tempting to believe that the choice we made is the only possible way when we've been encouraged by success.

I've worked with 12,000 children now at the Country School, our summer program, over 1000 of whom have been homeschooled. I'm sold on homeschooling, have been a solid homeschooling parent for over twenty years now, and have observed so many schooled kids who would thrive in a

homeschooling environment. On the other hand, I have on occasion worked with homeschooled children whom I felt would have been happier and more protected in the comparatively safe space of the classroom.

I feel a need somehow to give Mother Under Stress "permission" to put her children in school if necessary. And I want to say, no, you are not failing if you do this, but rather making choices that may be best for you and your family at this particular time in its process.

From Julie Scandora (WA):

What I find works best for me, since I am with the children so much, is withdrawing. I have my own interests and projects at home to occupy my time throughout the day. This allows me to attend to myself by doing what I enjoy while still being available to my children when they need me. It also keeps me from hovering over the children and getting overly involved in their activities. Since I am busy with my own work, the children do not bother me unless they really need my help or attention. Of course, we have times in the day just to talk or be together. But through mutual respect, we all let each other be when working.

Through experience I have found that if I do not have enough to do, I get too involved with the children. I become a manager, directing them, telling them how best to do something, constantly reminding them to attend to something. I found this especially so when the children took horseback riding lessons. I was constantly "helping" the instructor teach my children. Even after the lessons I would advise them on what they should or should not be doing. Magnify such behavior and you have the screaming parents on the sidelines of a children's sports game. I once asked a player how she can make sense of what the parents are shouting. She said she doesn't; she just ignores it all. So if the children tune out such parental interference, why bother? During riding lessons, now, I physically remove myself; I sit in the car and read or do something away from the lessons.

I find I can guide my children much more effectively by *not* being so involved. For example, by attending to my own interests, I demonstrate that one can fill the day doing what one enjoys. My example has far greater impact than any number of lectures I could give. Likewise, when the children engage in inappropriate behavior, I look to myself: are they learning the wrong things from me? Not infrequently they *are* my mirrors and I must first change myself before expecting them to behave better.

Parenting is not a one-way street. We are not only guiding our children into adulthood. They are also giving us opportunities for growth – if only we are open to their way of communicating. Through my children I have become more patient, more focused on what I want in life, and happier in the life I have chosen. It does not happen overnight. But it does happen if one both attends to one's own needs and respects one's children as individuals.

From Anne Macaire (Yukon):

Our sons are now 11 and 8. Up until six months ago they spent all of their lives in an extremely remote wilderness area. A year ago last fall, our oldest boy decided it was time for him to move to town. He wanted to make friends and be "normal." We always felt we would stay in the bush as long as the boys were happy, and Charles was definitely no longer happy. So we moved to town. I had suggested we homeschool in town, but he said no, if he was going to be normal, the best way to go about it would be to go to school. So we began our public school experiment, which is another story. What is of interest here is the great emotional relief my husband and I have felt, having the boys off on their own for much of the day.

I am in no way suggesting that school is the answer; in fact, it is very likely that we will be homeschooling again next year in town (now that the boys know all the kids), but it has become very apparent to me that given the dynamics of our family, we need time apart so that we can continue to appreciate each other. If we are homeschooling, we will have to structure that time to make certain it happens.

From Becky Clemments of Florida:

I used to feel upset when my son did something I didn't like or was socially unacceptable. Now I try to step back and see that he is his own person. I did my best, still try harder, but he is ultimately responsible. So the more I let go of my controlling behavior, the easier it gets, and the better I feel.

My husband and I talk about school as an option, but I know that it is not a real one for now. Still, talking about it and realizing that I am not truly trapped has helped also. Homeschooling is my choice.

Maybe it will help if you try to think of your children as if they were guests. Would you yell like this at a guest? What would you do? How would you handle your feelings? Can you be more pleasant? How? What do you do after you explode? And so on.

I find it helps to try to take breaks from each other daily. Allow time for all to regroup and do nothing. And finally I suggest, look at your boys, really look. Allow your love to come out, and share it.

The reader who wrote the letter we titled "Mother Under Stress" now writes:

I was touched and deeply moved by the outpouring of response that I read in issue #109. I want to thank all the articulate and supportive women who took time to share their similar feelings and encouragement.

In the eight or nine months that have passed since I wrote that letter, a few things have shifted in my life so that our days are less stressful. My boys are a little older now (4 and 7). I received some excellent professional help through counseling. Some specific unrelated personal tensions in my marriage have been eased. Every day is still a challenge to be creative within the "crucible" that Nicky Hardenbergh referred to, but the good times are more frequent than bad right now. The support of caring people like those whose letters in GWS I just read is also a major ingredient in this improvement. I plan to keep that issue out and about and open to those pages for handy reference when I need it. ◆

Exploring Mathematics

Our math series continues! See GWS #107 and #109 for more great math stories.

Setting Up Shop at Home

Carla Stein (MA) writes:

We've had a fair amount of success learning math through games, which I've written about before [GWS #104]. Most of those games were invented or developed with the purpose of "doing math" in a fun way. Something happened in our house this month that was a totally different experience and could never have happened in a school environment.

My 7-year-old son Ricky started it. He took the pizza slices from a fraction game we had and built himself a pizza shop out of huge cardboard blocks in the playroom. He invited me to shop there, using the play money from another math game called Fun at the Fair (but it hadn't been fun, and neither had the fraction game that the pizza came from). Ricky devised a menu, with different prices for each slice available, all the way from 1/16th to 1/2 a pizza.

Not to be outdone, my two other kids built themselves shops. Melody (5) had a pet shop stocked with every stuffed toy in the house. Our 9 year old erected Kenny's Hardware and spent several hours organizing little packages of screws, nails, etc. with precise price labels.

It looked like fun, so next to Kenny's Hardware I built a candy shop where I offered various tinker toy lollipops, bead suckers, and the like for so much a gram (using a nice little balance scale and lots of 1-, 5-, and 10-gram weights). We divided up the play money and did a roaring business until lunch time. I bought most of Kenny's building supplies to finish my shop, we all bought pets (to "attract customers" with), and had "lunch" at Ricky's Pizza Hut.

After lunch, things slowed down. Melody learned a sad lesson: a person can only buy so many pets, so she added some consumables to her line, namely pet food (Lincoln logs in a bag for cats, glitter for the fish). To perk things up I made some flyers, bought some stamps from Kenny (the ones that come in music club offers), appointed Melody the letter carrier, and waited.

Just as I hoped, the idea of mailing one another coupons caught fire. Kenny, who would usually rather walk the plank than write, actually sent us a few offers. Ricky was quite prolific. After an initial flurry of activity, though, things quieted down again. Mel's offer of a "free grooming with each new pet" wasn't having the draw she had hoped for, and the tears began to flow. Kenny had temporarily cornered the market on scissors, and was renting them out at $1 per use, but lost that source of revenue when Ricky rebelled and found his own, which he left "in the street, for everyone to use."

I thought the game would end then, but to my surprise, all three kids were down in their shops before breakfast the next day, wheeling and dealing and mailing and returning things to each other at a furious pace. I let Melody take over my shop, but candy wasn't doing much better than pets. "Nobody will buy anything from me," she moaned. The next day, the boys found a Radio Shack store in its place. Then Melody had more business than she knew what to do with.

Ricky started a new career as a grocer and I had to buy back my own real food from him to make supper at night. At lunch time, Monarch Food Supply (me) would sell him three lunches for $2 each, and he would sell them to Kenny and Mel for $3. "That way, buying wholesale, I get my lunch for free," he explained proudly.

Melody's pet store location being empty, I moved in and opened a bank which offered checking accounts, savings accounts, loans, and certificates of deposit. Thinking the game would end in a day or two, I planned it all on a daily basis (offering interest per day, for example). The game, however, went on for three weeks and the bank was in trouble very quickly.

It was easy for the kids to see that banks make their money by loaning it out at a higher rate of interest than they offer their customers on their savings accounts. Lively discussions about loans and credit ensued. To prop up the bank, I considered out loud offering credit cards, but this idea was unanimously rejected. The kids had heard me refusing such offers on the phone often enough to know better! I tried telemarketing the cards on the broken and toy telephones in their shops but no one accepted, even though they were "pre-approved, Mr. Stein ... ."

Library day came in the middle of all this, so I got out some books on the history of banks, where the money all goes, etc, a book on the history of money, and some stories about kids who started their own businesses. Over the course of the three weeks that this crazy circus was in session, we read them all. Melody learned how to identify all our coins and to tell 2's from 5's. The boys learned how to make change properly and how to keep a check book, how to figure interest and compound it, how to figure out the unit price of something, how to weigh things accurately, and how to count money. They learned a lot about advertising, practiced their addition and subtraction and their spelling and handwriting, and had an absolute ball doing it. I couldn't have planned a better unit study if I had tried – in fact, if I *had* tried, meaning, if I had originated the idea, prepared it all, and tried to get the kids to do it, it would have been a flop. As it was, it developed naturally and lasted for a good long time before the fun ended. I actually put an end to the game because the room had not been vacuumed in so long I couldn't stand it. The kids finally admitted they were a little tired of having to buy their pineapple chunks from Ricky every day anyway. And we're all looking forward to whatever comes next.

Finding Mentors Who Love Math

Eva Owens of Massachusetts writes:

Since I left school last year (what would have been my sophomore year in high school), I have explored several different approaches to studying math. At first I decided to do math on my own with the help of a Saxon textbook. I discovered that I hadn't gotten a lot out of the freshman algebra class I had taken, so I needed to review a lot of the material. For a while I worked steadily in the textbook and whenever I had a question, I would just ask my father. But I did less and less math work and I eventually stopped in the spring. I lacked enthusiasm for math; it just seemed like an endless stream of meaningless problems with meaningless answers that told me nothing about what mathematics was all about or why I should be studying it (a commonly asked question among students). It was bothering me, though, because I didn't want to lack math and science skills as homeschoolers are sometimes accused of doing; I wanted to be on par with my peers.

During the summer I thought I would get a tutor. I called Susannah Sheffer at GWS for advice as to how to find one. She told me that if I wanted to work on traditional math, the kind of math students do in school, it wouldn't be too hard to find a tutor. I could look on bulletin boards at colleges and libraries, which was what I did. I called up some people who had posted flyers advertising their services, but these people seemed very unenthusiastic about math. This was understandable seeing as they had only taught people who were not looking for enthusiasm; they were looking for a good grade.

Susannah had also mentioned that traditional, school math wasn't the only kind of math I could do. She told me about some articles in back issues of GWS that talked about more unusual math activities that homeschoolers were doing. I thought about this, but at the time, my priority was still simply finding someone who could help me keep up with what my peers were doing in school.

When September came around, I talked with Leslie, a professor who helps me figure out my academic priorities and schedule and who is a general mentor to me. She suggested I post a sign at M.I.T. in Cambridge. I did, and it read: "I'm a 16-year-old homeschooler/independent student living in the Boston area. I'm trying to find a professor of mathematics or a graduate student – with experience working with students – who would be interested in helping me study math. I have a considerable aptitude for mathematics. I need some more direction and structure to help me study further and to help fill in certain gaps in my studies of math. I also want to have the experience of working with someone who has a special enthusiasm and expertise in this field...".

I got calls from two graduate students and set up meetings with both of them. First I met with Alex Coventry who is majoring in number theory. I talked about what my goals were in studying mathematics, which, by then, had become (a) to keep up with my peers with respect to traditional math and (b) to explore non-traditional mathematics and find out what was so great about this subject. Alex was much more inclined to help me with traditional mathematics; his rationale was that I couldn't study any part of mathematics seriously without having first learned the basics. During that meeting he demonstrated his tutoring skills by actually doing a bit of tutoring with me. I liked him a lot and told him I would call soon.

As I walked across the M.I.T. campus to my appointment with Julie Rehmeyer, the other graduate student, I was wondering how I would be able to decide between them if I liked Julie, too. On the phone Julie had told me that she did a little bit of independent studying before she went to college at age 13 and she was very familiar with homeschooling. When we met, she said that she did not want to have anything to do with what is traditionally high school math. She wanted to do something fun and interesting that would help me figure out what mathematics is and see if I liked it. I was so excited because I had stumbled on the perfect combination of help. I didn't decide between the two; I chose them both. Between the two I could accom-

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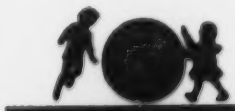

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plish my goals beautifully.

That was October, and now it's February. Recently I wrote two papers, one about why Euclid was so cool and the other about different theories concerning the nature of mathematics. In the second one, I proposed my original idea as to what mathematics *is*. Several times during these months I have entertained the idea of one day going to M.I.T. or at least seriously pursuing math at the college level. Through studying Euclid and Lobachevsky and just by being around Alex and Julie, two people who are completely in love with math, I have discovered a deep interest in mathematics.

What a Mathematician Does

Julie Rehmeyer of Massachusetts writes:

I am a mathematician, a graduate student in mathematics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I am a strong advocate of homeschooling, and was to some extent a homeschooler myself. One of the reasons I am so excited about homeschooling is to have the chance to teach my children math. So I am always sad to read in GWS about how much many homeschoolers struggle with math.

It's not really very surprising to me, though. Math is incredibly poorly taught in school, often by teachers who dislike the subject or have a poor understanding of it themselves. Furthermore, "school math" has very little relation to how I spend my time as a mathematician. As a result, the beauty of mathematics is often completely inaccessible to those who are learning it. Frankly, I think most people emerge from twelve years of schooling with very little sense of what mathematics is all about.

This is what I think math is all about, and why I love it: first of all, mathematics makes sense. Unfortunately, most of mathematics is taught as a little cookbook: after performing a series of steps, you will get a number which is declared the answer, and if you have done all the steps exactly as told, it is the "right" answer. Students are left mystified about why a particular series of steps is the right one or why the number they get at the end is the right answer. But to me, math is all about understanding. There is an amazing rush when you can say, "Aha! I get it! That's why it works that way!"

"School math" has very little relation to how I spend my time as a mathematician. As a result, the beauty of mathematics is often completely inaccessible to those who are learning it.

Math is beautiful. The beauty is similar to the beauty in music. It comes from the patterns, the rhythms, the way things fit together just so. The extent of the structure in mathematics is absolutely remarkable. You figure something out to solve one problem, and then find that the technique is just the right one for an entirely different sort of problem. Or you realize that the problem you've been working on is really just one example of a much larger and richer class of things.

Another reason I love math is that it is hard. That may sound perverse, but its sheer difficulty is part of the beauty. There is so much richness in math that no matter how clever you are, you have only perceived the tiniest bit of what is really going on. And the more you know, the more you realize how much you don't know.

What does a mathematician do, anyway? Essentially, we try to understand things about math that no one has ever understood before. The only way to get started on that is to discover for yourself things that other people have already figured out. So if, as you learn math, you are trying to really understand it, to discover it for yourself and make it your own, you are doing exactly what professional mathematicians do.

Another thing many people don't realize is that math is a social sport. Though some mathematicians work shut off in their attics, most don't. I work by talking to people, explaining what I know, asking people questions, trying to understand how someone else thinks about something.

I have been working with a homeschooling student in math recently, and we have had a whole lot of fun. We worked through the first book of Euclid's Elements, which is the first place that plane geometry was carefully described. We are just now beginning to study non-Euclidian geometry, which is a remarkable theory of a completely different kind of geometry. The development of non-Euclidian geometry changed how even mathematicians thought about what mathematics fundamentally is. So the student and I are following that development and thinking those questions through for ourselves.

Here are a few books I recommend: *A Mathematician's Apology* by G.H. Hardy gives a far better description of what math is like than I have done here. It is entirely non-mathematical in content, but simply tries to explain what math is about and why

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society should have pure mathematicians at all. *Gödel, Escher, Bach* by Douglas Hofstadter is huge and interesting. It can be somewhat demanding reading, but it requires little previous knowledge and has a wonderful annotated bibliography. *The Emperor's New Mind* by Roger Penrose is also very good. It is primarily a discussion of the extent to which computers can model the human brain, but it wanders into many related topics. *Gödel's Proof* by Nagel and Newman is an accessible exposition of a remarkable theorem in logic which has broad philosophical ramifications. Finally, Morris Kline has written a whole slew of books on the history and culture of mathematics. The ones I happen to have are *Mathematical Thought from Ancient to Modern Times*, which explains the evolution of mathematical ideas, and *Mathematics in Western Culture*, about the influence of mathematics on other areas of thought.

Unfortunately, none of these books is accessible to young children, but their parents might find them interesting for the broader view of mathematics they present.

Useful Materials

Lucy Clark wrote in the Winter 1996 issue of the HERO of Oklahoma newsletter:

One of the benefits of writing articles for newsletters is that one can feel justified in ordering products for the sake of reviewing. ... My 6-year-old had already pointed out some tesselation tiles in a catalog, so he was thrilled to find out that I had actually ordered them. These tiles, made from dense foam rubber, are inspired by the graphic art of M.C. Escher. The set we ordered contained 84 pieces in three basics forms – beetles, moths, and bumblebees – that all fit together to form very pleasing geometric shapes. The whole family has enjoyed playing with these shapes.

Another item that the whole family has enjoyed is a card game called Connections. The cards are beautifully made photographs ranging from sunsets to vegetables to architectural details to landscapes. The object of the game is to find a connection between the cards. This game easily lends itself to flexible rules and can be played cooperatively. My game-loving 6-year-old also likes to play this alone (if no one else is available). The other day as he was playing alone, he commented to me that he was very smart. He was feeling very good about some of the connections that he was coming up with. For example, he said that fish live in water and trees need water to live, so these cards could be placed side by side. Other connections might be by color, shape, or even by being opposites. The main emphasis in this game, of course, is critical thinking, so as long as the explanation is logical, we usually accept each other's connection.

The third item I bought was for Ian (my 6-year-old). Because it was relatively inexpensive, I bought it as a fun item and as a different way to play with arithmetic. Quite simply, it is a plastic bear with three see-through columns in its tummy. By pressing its paws, beads are released into these columns, clearly showing that 2+3=5, and by turning it over, we see that 5-3=2, and so on. Even though this type of simple arithmetic is easy for Ian, he made the connection between addition and subtraction for the first time when he saw how the bear worked. He was quite pleased with this revelation. Ian has enjoyed playing with this bear, and because it is easy to carry, he has taken it along to play with in the car. The baby likes to play with it, too, but mainly as a rattle. But who knows. Maybe she is already making some mathematical connections that we are not aware of.

Foam Tesselation Tiles, Connections, and Bear Facts are all available from Delta Education (Hands-On Math catalog), PO Box 3000, Nashua NH 03061-3000; 1-800-442-5444.

And in the John Holt's Book and Music store catalog:

"Anchor" Math, Leslie Hart. #1656, $16.95 + $4.50 s/h

The I Hate Mathematics! Book, Marilyn Burns. #368, $11.95 +$3.50 s/h

Math by Kids, Susan Richman. #3248, $6.95 + $3.50 s/h

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Focus

Collaboration Between Kids and Adults

Can kids and adults truly work together on a project? What makes it easier or harder? What are the benefits of collaborating? We asked several young people to reflect on these questions and to tell us about their experiences.

Writing and Co-Directing a Play

From Sarah Mantell (NY):

I started to write my play *Robin Hood: Girl with Wit* after reading the Robin Hood legend to my brother and realizing that Maid Marion was just about the only female in the whole story. How come all the heroic roles were men? That's what I wanted to change. I accomplished this simply by changing some of the male parts to female ones, such as Little John to Little Joan, Will Scarlet to Winnie Scarlet and, most importantly, Robin Hood (male) to Robin Hood (female). I talked to my parents about my ideas and they encouraged me to get them onto paper. I dictated the play to my mom. Then she typed it in while making comments such as, "How is your audience going to know this character's name is Little Joan?"

Then I gave copies to the parents who were leading our local homeschoolers' writing club, as well as to the parents of a few good friends, and asked for suggestions. Anne, one of the writing club leaders, suggested I add a whole middle section, which I did. If I hadn't, the play would have been about ten minutes long!

After the writing was finished, I called up friends and asked if they wanted to be in it, helped my mom arrange a date for rehearsals, and helped her move the dining room table so we'd have room for all sixteen kids. I also had to find a co-director to work with me – collaborative directing, so to speak. I couldn't direct with my mom because we were too similar in our styles. I needed a co-director who could balance me out. Robbin, the other writing club parent, agreed to help me. This was my first time directing a play and only my second time acting in one, so I was enormously grateful to have Robbin there. I was 10 and most of the kids in the cast were older than me, so it was nice to have a parental authority helping out. Because there were two of us, we could split up the cast and rehearse different scenes. An ex-Montessori teacher, Robbin solicited cooperation by asking for quiet and then waiting until it happened, whereas I would ask for quiet, ask again, and then ask if people were really serious about the play or not, at which point I too would get quiet. If I had been the only director, I would have eventually concluded that they weren't serious about the play anymore, and that would have been the end of the play. Good thing I wasn't the only director.

As rehearsals proceeded, I found out how well our group worked together, probably because we had kids ranging from age 6 to 16, which provided a nice range of skills and ideas. Robbin and I met regularly after rehearsals to discuss how they went, blocking, props, and goals for the next rehearsal.

As we went along, the cast added bits of humor to the production and even inspired changes in the script. Everyone worked on costumes and scenery together. As well as directing, I played the part of Winnie Scarlet. So when, a few weeks before the play, I realized that I didn't know my lines well enough, Robbin took over the directing.

Looking back on the play, I realize how many collaborations there really were. Many of these were with adults. First, working on writing and revising with my mom. Then Anne's suggestion to add a scene. Then the directing collaboration with Robbin. When I started writing the play, I had no idea how enthusiastic and helpful everyone was going to be. I could never have done it by myself or with just one of the collaborators. It took everybody's skills and ideas to make the play what it was.

Building a Boat Together

From Nathan Post (VT):

Dad and I built a sailboat together. I could not have managed to do this project by myself and Dad would not have chosen to do it by himself. But it was a great project for us to do together. We chose the design and constructed it as a team.

It started when, in the fall of '92, Mom's friend, Brandon, asked me if I wanted to build a sailboat. I said yes. He drew up plans for me. Dad and I looked over the plans together. We got enthusiastic about building ourselves a sailboat; however, Brandon's design wasn't right for us. We went to the libraries in our area and checked out a couple of books on building sailboats. We found one book that had plans for a 14-foot mini skipjack, and we decided to use this one.

The plan had a plywood rudder and an optional daggerboard. The boat was to be plywood with aspen stringers and a keel. She would be 12 feet long with a 2-foot bowsprit. The plans had a lanteen rigging (a one-sail rig), but we decided to build her with a sloop rig, which has two sails: a jib and a mainsail.

We began construction in March of '93. To start, we cut out and shaped the keel and stem. Dad showed me how to use the tools and together we made the necessary parts. Next came the bottom, fore and aft decks, bulkheads and stringers. As everything came together, we made the sides, mast, and bowsprit.

We came across some problems with the plans, though. The side panels didn't fit right. Together we figured out a better way of making them. We were discouraged that the plans weren't drawn right, but it was satisfying to get a good result anyway. We also designed and built our own oars. We finished up with the rudder, which we made out of plywood.

We named our boat Song Thrush. At last, we painted her and made the sails. My brother Brian helped paint her. He painted a country scene on each side. We made the sails from blue rip stop nylon. Mom showed Dad how to sew the seams and he sewed them on the sewing machine. Then we put in the grommets together (grommets are fabric hole reinforcements).

By the time we got Song Thrush ready to sail, it was September. She was very stable. By the second time sailing we had decided that we needed a daggerboard. Also, the rudder was not holding up very well.

We built the new rudder and daggerboard out of fiberglass board instead of plywood. There haven't been any problems since and she handles a lot better with the daggerboard. We want to make longer oars but haven't gotten around to it.

Sometimes it is hard for me to work with an adult, but it isn't really any different from working with kids. It is difficult if one of us is trying to take too much of the job away from the other one, if we are not communicating well, or if we are not listening to the other's ideas. Dad and I built Song Thrush together and we sail her together. This has been a really special experience, and I would like to do another project with Dad sometime.

Nathan and his father working on Song Thrush.

Teaching Chemistry at the Library

From Andrea Quarracino (PA):

I began to volunteer at the local library during the year I was 14. I would work one full day a week there and do any kind of extra work that needed to be done. I enjoyed it and got along well with the librarians. It turned out to be a really nice experience for me.

After I had been volunteering there for about a year, it became the district's turn to host the Science in the Summer program at the library. Science in the Summer is a program geared for younger kids in which scientists come to the library and teach a week-long course on a given topic. That year's topic happened to be chemistry, and since it was the first time that the library had hosted the chemistry courses, it was a completely new experience for everyone.

One of the librarians I was particularly close to was a woman named Ruth, and she asked me if I would like to work with her on the chemistry course that year. It sounded like a fun project, so I agreed.

I was at the library every day for five days that week, helping to set up the classroom, working with Ruth to assist the scientist in teaching the children about chemistry, and cleaning up after the class was over. The class about dry ice

was particularly fun. (Did you know that if you drop dry ice in a toilet, it will bubble and smoke before it evaporates? Fascinating!) I think we all learned a lot with that one. Working together with Ruth was a lot of fun, and in the end, I picked up some of the basics of chemistry at the same time.

I find it just as easy to collaborate with an adult as I would with a person of my own age. In fact, I have a tendency to find it easier to work with an adult, because when I am working on a project, I like to remain focused on what it is that I am doing. Somehow I do that better when I am working with older people. Also, because most adults are more experienced than I am, they can offer some very helpful insights or suggestions for the project we are working on together, whether it be painting a wall or running a class.

Creating a Farm Stand with her Parents

From Amber Weller (RI):

About five years ago, my parents and I wanted to start a small business venture to bring in some extra money. Together, we finally came up with an idea. We decided that a fall roadside stand would be a good business venture for us since we had ample room to grow fall crops like pumpkins, calico corn, gourds, and corn stalks. So right from the beginning, we worked on the project as a team.

First, we planned out the project together. Then, in the spring, we had to till the soil, fertilize, and then plant the crops. My dad did the tilling and my mom and I started the plants in tiny pots for transplanting to the field later in the spring. Through the rest of the spring and summer, we had to water, cultivate, weed, and fertilize our growing crops. We all shared in these chores, working together or on our own to get the job done.

When harvest time came, I did most of the harvesting because my parents were busy working at their regular jobs. I had to pick all the pumpkins and gourds, sort, weigh, and price them, cut the corn stalks, and bunch them for sale. Then I also had to prepare the cart and make the signs. Each year we have improved our set-up. My father kept looking for a better cart, and eventually we made our own. This was a part of the project which we worked on together and which I really enjoyed being part of, because I loved working on a construction project with my dad. My mother and I created the signs together since we both enjoy arts and crafts.

I feel that our pumpkin patch project is a great example of kids and adults working together. It has turned out to be a long-term project (we've been doing it for four years now). It's a project that has taken a lot of time, effort, and money to get going. We all worked on all aspects of the project. My parents took the responsibility for the things I couldn't do on my own – for instance, tilling the field, driving the stand out to the road with the truck, and getting supplies. But most of the tasks we could do together, which I liked because I love working with my parents. We shared all the work, all the rewards, all the difficulties. Some years we harvested great crops. Other years the crops were a disaster because of the drought or squash beetle damage. But nothing stopped us from trying again.

I don't really understand why some people think it's strange that adults and kids can work together on a project. If the project is enjoyable to everyone involved, then it's easy to work together. Both my parents and I love gardening, so the project we chose helped us share a common interest. When we all brought our ideas to share with each other, and when we had gone through a season, we realized that we all had a lot to learn about planning and running a roadside stand. We were learning *together*, not just the adults knowing everything and deciding everything and the kid just sitting on the sidelines waiting to be told what to do. Our project was wicked hard work, too much for any one person to do alone. We *needed* each other to succeed.

I suppose it might be hard for some adults and kids to work together. Some parents may not have enough time to do extra projects with their kids. Some adults may not think kids have ideas worth listening to. Some kids may not like to listen to the experience and advice of adults. Maybe the two groups find that they don't share any common interests.

I look forward to working on other projects with my parents or other adults. It's all about listening, learning, and having fun together.

Homeschoolers' Group Play

From Bryn and Kira Bundlie (MN):

We belong to a group called Twin Cities Unschoolers that meets each Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday to do projects, go on field trips, etc. Last spring we got the idea of putting on a play, so we began brainstorming about what kind of play to do. Since the ages of people interested ranged from 6 to adult, we found it difficult to come up with something that would include everyone. After a lot of searching, someone suggested *Little Women*, and when we looked over the script, we discovered the parts were almost perfect. Both kids and adults could act in the show.

The next step was to assign roles and set up rehearsal dates. We held a meeting to read the script to make sure

We were learning together, not just the adults knowing everything and deciding everything and the kid just sitting on the sidelines waiting to be told what to do.

we liked it, and then continued with one rehearsal a week. After a few weeks of practicing, we had to start considering the other things that go into planning a play, such as costumes, scenery, tickets, a program, advertising, and concessions.

A lot of great costumes came from the parent who became our director. She is very involved in community theatre and had a lot of great vintage clothing that fit the time period of the play perfectly. Anything else we needed we got from garage sales, attic dress-up boxes, and the skills of some of us who sewed.

Scenery came together much the same way, with everyone helping out. Both adults and kids brought in whatever they thought would be useful. One major thing we didn't have was a curtain, so some of the adults and a few kids spent a lot of time during rehearsals sewing together fabric squares to make a curtain of patchwork.

Adults and kids worked on sewing and making scenery and everything else together. We all made decisions by holding meetings and making suggestions. An adult was directing the play, but we chose her to do it because we needed someone who had a lot of experience in theatre. She didn't give orders and tell us what to do; she just suggested what would look best in the play. The kids were able to speak up and say what we thought, too.

Our group had tried having a kids-only play before, and at the beginning, some of the kids wanted this to be a kids-only play, too, because they wanted it to be *theirs*. They wanted to be in control. But we found out that we could still be in control and make decisions with adults involved, and it was very helpful to have adults involved because they have more access to materials. Having both kids and adults in the play worked out very well. The audience seemed to really enjoy our performance. We had a great time and were all disappointed when it ended, so we're planning to try a melodrama this spring. If you're in Minneapolis this spring, look for our posters!

Making Worm Compost Boxes

From Jarret Nelson (NJ):

We are part of a small support group that meets every Wednesday. We had visited the Liberty Science Museum together and there was an exhibit of worm boxes there (these boxes are used for composting organic kitchen waste using worms). The adults in the group decided that this might be a good project that we could all work on together and each family would have its own worm box.

Everyone in the group worked on the boxes together. Though the very youngest children were only allowed to do certain aspects of the work (due to safety factors), the older kids (8-12 years) got to do almost everything involved. We took turns doing the different jobs needed to make the boxes. One person would measure and mark the wood, one person would drill a hole, and another person would put a screw in. We also needed to saw wood and apply varnish to protect the wood.

One of the adults, Emily, was in charge of the project. She had gotten the directions for building the boxes from a book and had figured out what materials were needed and how much to get. She told the rest of the group what needed to be done and on a volunteer basis we decided what we wanted to do. Everybody had a chance to work on the different parts and we alternated a lot. This was done to keep things interesting and make it more fun. The adults and kids all took turns doing the same things; it was pretty evenly distributed.

I think in some ways it can be easier working with adults because they are more reasonable and focused. Kids can be more stubborn and distracted. On the other hand, it can be harder to relate to adults. It's more difficult to let loose and fool around when you're working with adults.

And from Amanda Nelson, Jarret's sister:

The adults told us what needed to be done and helped us when we needed it. I felt like we actually all worked together. We all did a fair share. You would not get jealous of someone having a job that you wanted to do, because there were more boxes and you could do that work on one of the other boxes. We all got a chance to do whatever we wanted to try. We also had the chance to relax when we wanted to and then come back and do more when we were ready.

I think it's sort of hard to work with other kids because some kids aren't serious and don't want to do the work. They'll try to give the work to someone else but it doesn't work out. So in that way it's good to work with adults. On the other hand, it can also be harder to work with adults because some adults are *too* serious about what they're doing.

Making worm boxes is a great project for a family or group, and it's a real John Holt tradition – he's the one who first told many of us about this form of composting. The book we sell here, *Worms Eat My Garbage* ($9.95 + $3.50 s/h), tells you what you need to know to get started. ◆

Watching Children Learn

Working at Bird Sanctuary

Cori Lock (MO) writes:

Last fall (September to December) I participated in the Captive Management and Rehabilitation internship and the World Bird Sanctuary near St. Louis, MO. WBS's primary purpose is to educate the public about the status of threatened and endangered bird species worldwide and to show what people can do to help. In Captive Management, I helped feed and water the raptors and parrots, clean birds' weathering areas and mews, and make minor repairs. (Weathering areas are yards containing numerous perches to which we tied the birds with a leash through leather anklets. They got more sunlight, fresh air, and opportunities to exercise than they did in the night mews; mews are houses they are kept in.)

When I worked in the Rehabilitation facility I cared for sick or injured raptors. Some were brought in by people who found them near roadways or buildings and others were going to be taken to shows. I prepared food for the birds, cleaned their boxes, gave them fluids or medications, checked on their healing, and got to go on a few releases of rehabilitated birds.

Though I signed up for the Captive Management and Rehab internship in particular, I took part in other aspects of the sanctuary's work. For instance, I helped care for Cochin (a breed of chickens they train for running across the stage at shows) chicks in the sanctuary's propagation facility. I was also lucky enough to have barn owls breed and lay five eggs while I was there. All five eggs hatched and the chicks were very healthy, considering the fact that spring, rather than fall, is the normal hatching time. (The sanctuary releases barn owls to help bring their numbers back up here in the midwest where they are endangered.)

One day I spent at the Office of Wildlife Learning (OWL for short!) at Lone Elk County Park. The office has a large room where school groups can come to see a program. It's like a visitors' center – a place people can come to see birds in their weathering area, learn about raptors and parrots, buy souvenirs, etc. The shows I have referred to a couple of times are also presented at OWL and at various theme parks and zoos nationwide. In most of them, birds are free flown just inches above the audience.

Through the internship I learned a lot about raptors, parrots, and rehabilitation techniques and procedures. I could not have interned if I were not homeschooled, because interns work at least eight hours a day, five days a week. World Bird Sanctuary can always use help, whether from an intern or from a weekly volunteer. For more information contact World Bird Sanctuary, PO Box 270270, St. Louis MO 63127; 314-938-6193; fax 314-938-WING.

This is a good time to remind you that Stephanie Tolan's wonderful novel A Time to Fly Free *is about a boy who decides to leave school and become a homeschooler, and one of the important activities in his out-of-school life is his work with a man who helps wounded wildlife. The book is now out of print, but we have some copies here, so order one while you can: $3.95 + $2 shipping.*

Creating a Recycled Paper Business

Katharine and Leonor Colbert of West Virginia write:

We are 10 and 7 years old. About a year ago, our family joined an Ecoteam because we thought it would be good to learn about our environment and how garbage damages the earth. (Ecoteams are a project that our local Friends Meeting sponsored; a few households meet regularly and help each other figure out ways to live more efficiently and in ways that are more environmentally responsible.) As a recycling project, we decided to make recycled paper. After a little practice, we thought our paper looked pretty nice and thought maybe we could sell it. Since we made the paper out of used paper that was thrown away, we thought we could make a lot of money because we would not have to buy many supplies.

We talked about the business idea with our mom. First we had to decide what we wanted to sell. We thought packaged stationery would be a good item. But to make envelopes and nice, flat paper, we had to get some more equipment like a paper press and a special mold for envelopes. We also had to think of a lot of different things like a business name, and we decided to have a rubber stamp made so we could stamp our packages. We also had to think of how we would sell the paper, so we had to consider advertising. Our mom said that this would cost a lot of money. She helped us figure out how much money we would need to get started.

Soon after these ideas came up, our mom saw a short article in GWS #104 saying that Manoj Padki and Manisha Kher were offering interest-free loans for homeschooled kids who were running businesses. We wrote Manoj and Manisha and told them about our business idea. They wrote us back and asked a lot of very good questions that we needed to think about – like how many packages we

thought we could make in a year, how much we were going to charge for the stationery, where we were going to sell the paper, and things like that. After a few letters back and forth, we were given the loan and our parents helped us order the equipment.

When we received the new equipment, we started working three days a week for about two hours each day. We were able to make three packages of stationery a week. We sold a lot of packages to neighbors, friends, and family. We even went to a homeschoolers' business day in Columbus, Ohio and sold some paper there. But we needed to sell more, so we decided to put an ad in GWS. But before we could place the ad, we had to come up with an idea for an ad. It was difficult to decide what was most important to put in a small ad space. We also had to come up with an order form. This took a lot of tries. One time, we forgot to put a place for the person who was ordering. When the ad came out, some people sent for information but no one bought our paper. We got a little discouraged and almost quit.

We had another meeting with our mom. We decided to work only one day a week, to change our prices, to sell individual sheets and envelopes, and to sell our bookmarks too. We had to change our order form and we decided to try another ad in GWS.

We have learned and are still learning a lot of things. We now know that running a business is hard work and takes dedication. We have realized that sometimes we need to be willing to change our products and prices to attract more customers. We have learned how to keep our money records. We have learned that when we are grumpy, work goes really slowly, but if we are in a good mood, work goes by in a snap. We have learned that it is important to pay ourselves once in a while even though we still owe money on our loan. We are really proud that we are paying back our loan and we are proud of our product.

Our paper-making business has been a good experience. We probably won't sell handmade paper forever, but we have learned a good craft and will enjoying using our paper for a long time.

See the Colberts' ad on p. 5.

Growing as Homeschoolers

Gail Sichel (NY) writes:

Last year we moved from New Jersey to New York, and New York requires a lot more documentation than New Jersey did. At first I went crazy. We created a curriculum for ourselves and then we tried to stick to it. It was quite painful because we had previously created curriculums and used them as guides, but because I now had to send in quarterly evaluations and a final evaluation at the end of the year, I felt compelled to stick to what we had said we would do. Corianna did feel a deep sense of accomplishment from finishing what we had set out to do, but the process was not easy. We gave her a diploma, which made finishing the 4th grade more official.

The curriculum Corianna and I developed was based on Weekly Reader Skills books. I figured that the skills books would mention the points that "needed" to be known, then there'd be a few practices, and then we'd move on. This worked well for

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Maps, Tables, and Graphs. We ended up not doing the Math because there was not enough detail and I could not provide adequate explanations. Instead we played dice games and Monopoly, and then, after reading the introduction to a Saxon math book, Corianna decided to try that for this year.

The English Language skills book we both found boring. This year I decided to drop that book, and after reading Susannah's "If Not Grammar Textbooks, Then What?" in GWS #109, I felt so confirmed. Corianna is keeping a journal and both she and her younger sister have gotten involved in writing articles for the local newspaper, which is creating a monthly section that is done – from articles to layout – by the children. It has been a valuable experience for both my kids in that they have enjoyed writing articles, seeing them in print, and getting praise from people who know them. Of course, one person said to me, "She didn't come up with that by herself, I'm sure." I said, "The idea was hers, and she rewrote it many times, and sometimes with help – but she did all the work herself. Because someone gets help, that does not mean they did not do it themselves." Once again it is from having read this point in GWS that I could reply with such confidence from a deep belief inside me.

This year, Corianna is reading and reading novels on her own. This has been a wonderful source of growth, pleasure, and sense of accomplishment for her. And a very beautiful awareness is evolving too. I had heard of books that a lot of kids were reading – the Babysitters Club series, books by Judy Blume, and a few others. I gave Corianna some of these, and she came to me saying she did not want to read them. They were inconsistent with the values we were learning, she said, and did she have to finish them? I said no, books are like people: some we want to get closer to than others. And she might also want to read these books at another time, or might not. It was interesting to me that she is very aware of what she wants to put into her mind and heart. A few months later she asked if she could finish one of the books. I said of course. She did, and said she'd wondered about the ending, and that she felt she could handle the book then. At this time of her life, she is becoming aware of growing up. Sometimes she wants it and other times she doesn't, but she can choose what she can handle. I'm confident she'll find the strongest guidance from inside, and it won't steer her wrong. This is a wonderful gift from homeschooling, that she can continue to move into the world at her own pace.

On another subject, I wrote in GWS #86 about my father being worried and concerned about homeschooling. He's gotten older, and gets upset by less in general – but also, he sees how fine my children are, and I've heard through the grapevine that he praises them and our parenting. His earlier discussions and negative comments and fears have dissipated with his very positive experiences with the kids and with the increased number of positive articles he's read in his various papers. This is such a nice turn of events. In fact, he may even be a bit proud that his grandkids are in the vanguard!

Managing Household Chores

More from Gail Sichel:

I've gone through a change in the way that I've approached chores. At one point I wanted to do all the chores so that the kids could focus on their play – and they would join me when they wanted. After a while, I began to feel resentful. Corianna was old enough for chores, I felt, so I went through various techniques to make chores happen without too much hassling and reminding on my part. But I got tired, after a while, of always reminding and making consequences. I realized that the chores were important to me, but not to her, and the consequence of not doing them that I had imposed – not being able to do something fun later on – punished *me*. So with anger and resentment, I took all the responsibilities back. It was disappointing on some level to Corianna, but not very.

So then I had to figure out: how important is the chore? the responsibility? who is it important to? And how else can this be approached? When I spoke to the kids about this, they had no solutions. They said they want to be helpful, but they forget. Then it occurred to me that what I was focused on was getting the task done. They still focus more on the process. So now, even though it takes longer, everybody is involved in each of the tasks. No one is left to get overwhelmed and no one is left alone to get lost in daydreaming or other distractions. I had to get another watering can so we can all do it together, but it makes a difference, and now that we do it together, cleaning after meals is a more cheerful time. I still have the challenge about things like vacuuming – I'm not buying two more vacuum cleaners! – but I'm sure the solution will appear, and then I'll wonder how it was that I didn't see it sooner.

Cheryler Duncan (MO) writes:

I started my children out when they were very young and anxious to "do work" by having them help with housework and chores. Although many times it was actually more work for me to have them helping, it has paid off many times over. Both Tyler (12) and Cally (10) are now very helpful, do a good job, feel pride in their work, and have a good idea of how much work goes into keeping a ... home.

When painting our house, we set up a paint tray and roller outdoors where mess didn't matter, undressed Tyler, and let him roll paint onto shelves for our closets. He didn't make a mess in the house, yet he knew he was doing real work and contributing to our family.

Similarly with Cally, we'd put her in the bathtub wearing only shorts, sprinkle in a small amount of cleanser, give her some sponges and brushes, and let her scour away. (We washed her hands and feet afterwards to remove cleanser.) To this day, scouring our sinks is one of Cally's favorite jobs.

From Jan Brownlie (New Zealand):

An area in which I do things differently from many others is housework. While the children are free to work with me at any chores, I

don't insist they help with housework on a regular basis. This is because I have a vision of them choosing to work cooperatively. In practice this is just starting to pay off. Lizzie, at 12, will notice if something needs doing and just do it (sometimes). I know this is an area where I am out of synch with our culture.

Exploring Reading at 3

Deborah Dies of British Columbia writes:

After I discovered John Holt, I changed my views on schooling. It took very little reading of his work to be convinced. Still, at times, because of my upbringing and surroundings, I have my doubts. It does not take me long to remember, though. I watch my 3-year-old daughter Caleigh and I know.

From Caleigh's activities of late, I realized that she is learning to read and write. She is still 3 and it might take her three years or more (or less) to complete the task, but I realize I am seeing the process in action. She has memorized many of her favorite books. I watch her sit with a book in front of her, saying the words and turning the pages at the right time. She also talks about letters and numbers. She'll ask what time it is, I'll tell her it's 3:00, and she'll tell me it's 8:00. She knows to look at the clock before she says it. And she'll ask me to tell her what specific letters are, and she'll ask me to write down the letters she says. She takes rocks and sticks and pencils and makes them into letters, or asks me to help her.

She may not always be right, but she is grasping the concepts. I don't know when she will finish learning to read and write, but she is on her way and *enjoying* it. It is at her will; we do not push or bribe her. She just wants to do it – no one has to make her want to learn.

Learning from Mistakes

In GWS #106, our Focus was on "Learning From Mistakes." Nose Kai Croue-Getty (VA) writes on the same theme:

I have been working with my dad in the pottery studio since I was very little, at first just getting the clay all over me, then, at about age 6 or 7, starting to make some pots. I think that generally it's been a success. When I was just making slab trays, which is what I started out with, not much could go wrong, but when I started making pots on the wheel, I made mistakes more often. At first, I would get very frustrated at not getting it right. But gradually I learned from my mistakes and each time I did it better.

I've been playing soccer for four years in a local league and I consider myself pretty good. But to get this good I had to practice a lot and make a lot of mistakes. For example, on one occasion, I was heading toward the goal with the ball, and I waited to shoot until I was right next to the post of the goal. Then I shot, but the ball bounced off the post and the goalie picked it up and punted it down field. Well, from that experience I learned to pass sooner or shoot more quickly! ◆

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Homeschoolers as Teachers

Did you think we meant "homeschooling parents who teach in schools?" That's what the phrase "homeschoolers as teachers" often suggests, but this time, we're hearing from grown homeschooling *kids* who now find themselves in teaching situations.

Teaching Ceramics Class

Abigail McNulty-Czapsky (NY) writes:

My sister Clytie and I were recently hired to teach a children's ceramics class. I am 18 and Clytie is 16. We were recommended for the job by a local artist at whose studio we have studied pottery, sculpture, and figure drawing and whom we had served as assistants during a summer course in Japanese ceramics. As assistants, we were given the task of making a Japanese room out of a part of the studio attic. After the last class, there was a party with sushi and Japanese tea, and a few months later, when the pots from the class had been fired, they were exhibited in a show with all the other stuff that had been made over the year.

Clytie and Abigail in kimonos at the pottery show.

including some sculptures of Clytie's and mine. We wore our kimonos (which we had bought in a Japanese store) to the show and conducted a Japanese paper-doll workshop with our mother.

The summer was barely over when the owner of a local gallery called and wanted to know if we would be interested in teaching a ceramics class for children. We were surprised and flattered and agreeable to the idea. Our class was comprised of five kids, two of whom were our younger sisters. Somehow I hadn't realized how different being in charge is from being an assistant. It's very strange to find oneself in such a position of authority when the impression of resentment toward patronizing and bossy adults is still so fresh in one's mind and at the same time to feel oneself close to slipping into that kind of behavior. For instance, I know I hovered terribly over the children in the first class. This was partly because they did need to be told how to do things like wedge the clay (so their pots wouldn't explode from air bubbles) and build with coils, but it was also because I didn't have anything else to do but nose around in their work. Of course, the kids soon got sick of the constant stream of questions, comments, encouragement, and praise I was showering upon them. I decided to make my own pot, if only for the sake of keeping my hands off their work.

The next class presented a new problem. Two of the children took an intense disliking to each other, which resulted in some pretty ugly repartee and general disruption of the class. I wasn't sure what to do. I was afraid of making a bigger deal out of the argument – which didn't seem to have any real point; they were just trading random insults – so I didn't try to coerce them into stopping their argument, and in fact I made no comment about it until they escalated into clay throwing. Then I said something like, "Stop that, please." They did stop, for a little while, but then the teasing resumed. This was confusing for me. For the first time, I could understand the anger of some adults who think children force them to be mean. I still dreaded, however, being thought of as one of those discipline-obsessed adults who come bursting into the children's affairs, only to make things uglier than ever. I knew what the wrong way of handling a situation like this was, from my own scornful observations of adults trying to enforce their wills, but I hadn't really thought about what the right way was. Since I was more willing to err on the side of being cautious and unrespected than respected and disliked, I never took an aggressive position in ending the fight.

I would be very interested in hearing about the experiences of other homeschoolers who have found themselves in teacher positions.

Teaching Sign Language Class

We asked another homeschooler with a similar experience to respond to Abigail. From Amanda Bergson-Shilcock (now 19):

I've been teaching a sign language class for a small group off and on since last summer. As with most things, I just sort of fell into it. I'd taken a few years' worth of weekly sign language classes, but didn't consider myself an expert of any kind. But somehow a woman who knows my family got the idea that it would be fun to learn to sign, and she got a few other people together, and they talked to me, and the upshot was that we set aside an hour a week to meet and work together.

Our classes have been a learning experience at least as much for me as for my students. It's often said that the best way to learn a subject is to teach it, and there's more than a little truth to that idea. I've enjoyed having the opportunity just to practice, as signing is a "use it or lose it" type of skill. But

I've also been adding to my store of knowledge about people, and classes and teaching in general.

My students are children (so far I've had ages 7, 10 and 11) and adults. As you might expect, they're all at different places, both in what they can handle developmentally and in their areas of interest. One of my biggest challenges has been to balance differing needs. But I'm not bound by any sort of curriculum, which is nice. And the fact that my students are homeschooled children and homeschooling parents is of some importance. For one thing, it means that everyone in class wants to be there, which makes my job a good deal easier. Removed from the pressures of having to be the disciplinarian or authority figure, I don't have to deal with the issue of control and can concentrate on the class itself rather on maintaining order. I sympathize with Abigail's difficulties – it is indeed entirely different when you are expected to be The Teacher as Boss.

Having recently read Alfie Kohn's *Punished by Rewards*, I've also been trying to guard against either the carrot or the stick method of so-called teaching. That assignment that I've given myself has proven to be somewhat complicated. I don't think bribes or threats accomplish much more than short-term compliance, but I do fall victim to giving praise. It's as if, having been put in the position of leader of the class, I automatically assume that I am in charge of telling everyone else how they're doing. I catch myself doing this far more often than I would wish, and it's proving quite vividly to me how very difficult it is to get away from that mentality.

Even though I know that everyone has chosen to come to class and that they have all expressed interest in doing what they're doing, I still slip into my "I Am Running This Class" mentality at some times. What I strive for is more of a guiding of the class, and it frustrates me that when I have such a wonderful group of people (after all, in many of the classes I have attended, notably college courses, many students DO NOT want to be there) I still struggle with these school-type issues.

When we resumed class after a winter break, I asked my students to jot down on a piece of paper exactly what sorts of things they would like to cover in class. In other words, were they more interested in going straight through a sign language book, learning signs; practicing; playing games; talking informally; or what? Their answers helped me to figure out where we were going with class, and I've begun using my own sign language reference book as a textbook of sorts, typing up informal vocabulary lists for in-class and at-home practice.

This is somewhat new and strange to me, as I spent a large portion of my life either learning without textbooks or merely dipping into them. Often I'm feeling my way, trying to think of a way besides drills or question/answer exchanges to teach these signs. Some weeks I feel better about how the class went than others; often my students surprise me in their ability to absorb information.

My homeschooling background has served me well, although sometimes I actually forget how different my perception is from the mainstream outlook. I didn't feel pressure to start my class at Point A and make it to Point B by a certain deadline; I didn't worry that there were things my students "should" learn first or second. My background meant that I was lucky enough to come into this learning experience expecting to get and to act on feedback from my students. Unlike teachers in more formal systems, I didn't have to feel threatened by the idea that my class could be student-guided. And since grades have never been a significant part of my life, it didn't occur to me until I sat down to write this essay that some people might wonder why my class had never gotten any.

I'm getting good practice in signing from this class; I'm also getting a wonderful view of what classes can be like and what I can do to make a good class even better. Though it's depressingly easy to slip into some schools of thought (pardon the pun), it's also refreshing to realize how easy it is to do away with arbitrary and artifical factors when everyone is amenable. I don't know whether this class will be in existence this time next year, but I do know that it's already enriched many lives – mine most of all. ◆

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How Adults Learn

As John Holt said, it's never too late for adults to learn something new, and we don't always need classes to do it, either. If you're helping children learn, you gain a lot of perspective if you're also learning a new skill yourself. Here are some stories about adults learning — tell us yours!

Learning Esperanto

Robert Henderson of Washington writes:

I learned a new language in two days.

My Esperanto adventure began five years ago as a result of problems I encountered while corresponding with a woman in Khazakhstan, a former Soviet republic near Afghanistan. She spoke no English at all; my Russian is truly pathetic. It took me a week to read her letters and even longer to reply. My efforts were pretty crude, something like, "I have a dog. The dog is black. I like my dog." She spent hours deciphering these insights. While laboring on one of her letters, I translated this sentence: "This would be much easier if we learned Esperanto."

Esperanto is a language developed near the turn of the century by a doctor named Ludwig Zamenhof. Because his rich, expressive language is specifically designed to be learned quickly, it has spread throughout the world. Estimates of the number of Esperanto speakers today run into the millions.

I found an Esperanto grammar and dictionary at the public library and skimmed them whenever I had a free minute. Two days later I wrote my correspondent a three-page reply. I commented on events in her country and mine. I told her Christmas was coming and described our holiday customs. I wrote about favorite foods and rock groups and mentioned my fascination with the Russian space program, as her home is near the Russian launch facility. I soon received her reply. It too was in Esperanto, and I read it in minutes.

Since then I've met many new friends all over the planet through Esperanto. I have pen-pals in Africa, Europe, and Asia, and have learned more about life in other countries than I ever could have without living there. Neither they nor I have to make language choices that leave someone at a disadvantage. And because Esperanto is so rich, we communicate freely on any subject we desire.

How did I learn Esperanto so quickly? Well, to begin with, Esperanto has no irregularities. Most languages have rules, such as "i before e except after c." Then come all the exceptions: weird, either, heir, and so on. The exceptions take longer to memorize than the rule. In Esperanto, though, rules are rules. When you've learned them, you're done.

Pronunciation in other languages often poses the same problem, but in Esperanto, all the letters are always pronounced the same way, so I always know how to say a new Esperanto word.

In the other languages I speak, identifying the parts of speech has always been confusing. Take the English word "tree," for example. Sometimes it's a noun: "Look at that tree." But I might say, "The dogs like to tree squirrels" – now it's a verb. If I say, "Nice tree house!", it plays the role of an adjective.

However, the last letter of every Esperanto word tells you what kind of word it is. Because I always know what a word is doing in a sentence, I can often figure out what a strange word means.

What helped me the most, though, was Esperanto's additive vocabulary. That means you add modifiers to a word to get related terms. In English, we have bull, cow, calf, and herd. These words are all related, but you can't tell that by looking at them. In Esperanto, the same words are bovo, bovino, bovido, and bovaro. The only word I had to learn was the first one. Then I just added the endings that mean female, offspring, and group, and got four words for the price of one.

Because Esperanto is so logical, it's the only language I've learned successfully from books and tapes. Of course, oral proficiency requires talking and listening, as it does in any language. Still, a man once complimented me on my spoken Esperanto and asked if I spoke it often. I confessed that he was the first person I'd ever conversed with in Esperanto. We were both amazed.

Anyone interested in learning Esperanto can call the Esperanto Ligo por Norda Amerika (Esperanto League for North America) at 1-800-828-5944, or write ELNA at PO Box 1129, El Cerrito CA 94530. They will send you a free packet of information, including Lesson 1 of their free ten-lesson postal course.

Iam ajn vi kaj mi kunparolos Esperante! (Someday maybe you and I will converse in Esperanto!)

Homeschooling Helps Mother Learn Too

Margaret McLeod (NB) writes:

Homeschooling has made some unexpected changes not just in my 13-year-old daughter's life but in my life, too. I'd always wanted to learn to play a musical instrument, but didn't get the chance when I was a kid and thought it would be too difficult as an adult. John Holt's *Never Too Late* and other writings about music encouraged me to get a keyboard and take piano lessons from the grandmother of one of my daughter's friends. I learned, though, that what I really wanted was the responsiveness of a piano. A friend found an ad in a buy-and-sell paper. I was able to trade the keyboard and $75 for an old, clunky upright which joined the computer in

completely taking over what was supposed to be the dining room. I've decided that a room should be used for what you need, not for what the real estate agent says it's for.

That's another evolution for me – paying more attention to my own wants than to what everyone thinks or to what I've been told. Homeschooling is a giant step outside convention and can encourage you to take others. I liked hearing about a family who, after much planning and soul-searching, left a lifestyle that wasn't right for them and moved on to something else. I liked being reminded that people and situations change. Too often, I look for the ultimate solution to my problems, thinking that if I had a certain kind of job or man, or a book of poetry published, or any of a hundred other things, then I could be happy forever. That's a disservice the endings of many books and movies have done for us, ending on those occasional moments of certainty, when ten minutes or ten weeks or months later, that certainty just doesn't fit us anymore. The more you can get outside certain grey boxes in the system, such as school or many jobs, the greater the chance you have of responding to change, either imposed from the outside or growing within you.

Homeschooling has also made me much more aware of how I learn, and that it's rarely from classes. I learn by reading books and by talking things through with people. Another way is by doing things, even if they scare me, because they'll take me in a direction I really want to go. For example, when I helped start an alternative arts magazine eight years ago, I had to do things that made me uncomfortable, like calling up bureaucrats and potential advertisers looking for money, and calling anyone else who might have some good ideas or some way to help. My cohorts and I were all young and had absolutely no experience. There were people who believed we didn't have the right, because we didn't have impressive credentials. Sometimes *we* couldn't believe we had the nerve to do the things we did. I'd wake up in the middle of the night worrying about something I'd committed us to. We ended up with a 32-page magazine called *Wild East* that ran for several years and that made us contacts and developed interests that led to other things.

Books and Tapes about Learning

Marian Bever (IN) writes:

More and more I am aware that I have been one of the beneficiaries of this home-centered learning process right along with the boys. Several years ago, my husband discovered motivational tapes and books. I haven't listened to as many of the tapes as Tom has, but I have read a number of the books. A couple of months ago I read Brian Tracy's book *Maximum Achievement*, in which the author happened to mention Georgi Lozanov and the research he did in Bulgaria with accelerated foreign language learning. He used foreign language teaching for his research, because it offered him a way of being sure his students/research participants had no prior knowledge of the subject. I was a German teacher before homeschooling, so this was of interest to me. I wrote to Brian Tracy and asked him where I could find out more about this. He wrote back and suggested a book called *Superlearning* by Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder. When I went to the library, I found that these same authors had written another book called *Superlearning 2000*. I decided to read the more recent book first.

This book was so exciting to me that I could hardly sit down long enough to read the whole thing. Superlearning is based on techniques pioneered by Dr. Lozanov. Among other things, it involves getting into the proper state for learning: a relaxed body and an alert mind. It involves engaging both hemispheres of the brain simultaneously in the learning process, which makes the learning easier and longer-lasting. One of the ways to involve both hemispheres simultaneously is to present information to musical background.

Superlearning 2000 led me down a few interesting side paths. I read the autobiography of Alfred Tomatis called *The Conscious Ear*. He describes his work with hearing and sound therapy and the development of the Electronic Ear, a machine which can filter out or enhance certain frequencies that we hear. He figured out ways to use this to help opera singers who had lost their voices, and he used it to treat autism, stuttering, dyslexia, and some other kinds of disabilities that most of us never thought of as being a hearing problem.

The most recent book I have read is by Lynn Dhority and is called *The ACT Approach: The Use of Suggestion for Integrative Learning*. The author is a German teacher, so that attracted me to the book. His concern for his students and his dislike of giving grades or tests should ring a bell with many homeschooling parents.

I have genuinely experienced the joy of learning during the past few months. I wish the same for all of you! ◆

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Resources & Recommendations

History and Social Studies Books

In GWS #109 we listed several interesting books about education that we hadn't been able to fit into last year's catalog. Here are some more books from last year's review process:

Don't Know Much about Geography, by Kenneth Davis. I was looking for a good geography book several years ago. I bought *The Geography Coloring Book* from John Holt's Bookstore and my daughter Clare (now 16) loved it. This one is great to use with the coloring book because it looks at geography from a different viewpoint. Lots of good information presented in an easy, accessible, slightly humorous style. I loved the titles like "Is the earth's crust well done?" and "What's so hot about the equator?" The author defines terms and anchors the information in history as well as tells where things are. He even deals with imaginary places like Atlantis and El Dorado. – Madalene Murphy

Psychology for Kids II, by Jonni Kincher. What I like about this book is the interesting and sometimes valuable information about people and human nature. For example, as part of Experiment #4, "How Easily Are People Fooled," there is a "Fake Personality Profile" much like what can be found in horoscope books. The author explains in detail why it's a one-size-fits-all description. People are likely to feel the profile fits them individually when actually it fits everyone. A variety of topics are covered in the book that would help kids think about their own behavior and others'. – Janine Broumand

Radio Man, by Arthur Dorros. This book works well on several levels. First, it's a good story of a Hispanic family who are migrant farm workers traveling from Texas to Oregon – it discusses family ties, friendships, the lifestyle, the radio stations which have programs for them. The illustrations are nice too. The side-by-side Spanish translations work well too so you can often find the corresponding words easily. A pronunciation guide would have been nice, but I guess one picture book can't have everything. Still, we know no Spanish and this book taught us many words easily. We've read lots of bilingual books and few are as clear as this one. – Phoebe Wells

"Under the Microscope" Videos

Deborah Goldeen (CA) writes:

I've come across what I think is a particularly nifty educational resource. It is a series of videos of stuff under a microscope. By "stuff" I mean: Sac Spiders, Wasps, Ladybugs, Red Mite (eating a Book Louse), Moth wing scales, Mesh Fabric, Bug Netting, Planaria, Tubiflex Worms, Pizza, Potato, Yogurt Bacteria, Epsom Salt Crystals growing. If you can get it under a microscope, Warren Hatch, the creator of these videos, has put it there and filmed it. There are three videos that are smorgasbords and a bunch that are specialized, like Seeds Under the Microscope or Crystals Under the Microscope. All the videos are over an hour long. I think there are twelve or so in the series, but I can't be sure as in my enthusiasm for them, I've given away my catalog. This is a no-frills production, no sound track or fancy editing. Mr. Hatch gives a pretty hokey, yet informative, narration with his slightly reedy, nasal voice. I consider these qualities to be an asset. A teacher's guide is included which gives lists of books and names and addresses of equipment catalogs and "neat groups you can join" like the Young Entomologists' Society.

The videos are listed for sale in the back of the J.L. Hudson seed catalog: send $1 to J.L. Hudson, Seedsman, Star Rt 2, Box 337, La Honda CA 94020.

Asia for Kids

We received a sample of the Asia for Kids catalog, which contains books, cassettes, software, and materials related to the cultures of Japan, China, and Korea. Some items that look interesting are: the Dr. Seuss Chinese Bilingual Series, Chinese Folktales, Let's Play Games in ... (each language). Recipes for cooking the cuisine of all three cultures. An accompanying press release says that the catalog also plans to carry videotapes and ethnic dolls. Asia for Kids, 250 E. Fifth St, #1500, Cincinnati OH 45202; 1-800-765-5885.

In-Home Art Classes

Another press release we received is for Kuumba Art Classes, Inc. The description says, "Students from age 5 to adult can sharpen their skills of creative expression in the privacy of their own homes with a professional art educator. ... Professor T. Naila Ford has been making art and teaching for more than a decade. ... Ford's teaching philosophy has a firm foundation in the belief that art making is a highly individualized process unconcerned with age definitions. Of traditional art institutions Ford says, 'Most schools design their programs around age restrictions. [They decide] at this age a person should have these skills, at that age they should have those. At KAC artists are encouraged to develop at their own rate.'"

Classes include drawing, painting, portfolio preparation, and art career consultation. It seems as though this might be valuable for a serious art student who doesn't live within easy access of art studios and classes. Let us know if you try it. Kuumba Art Classes, 404-595-1347. ◆

Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our complete 1996 Directory was published in GWS #108. Our Directory is not a list of all subscribers, but only of those *who ask to be listed*, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information - last name, full address, and so on. Tell us if you would rather have your phone number and town listed instead of your mailing address (we don't have space to list both).

If a Directory listing is followed by a **(H)**, the family is willing to host GWS travelers who make advance arrangements in writing.

If a name in a GWS story is followed by a state abbreviation in parentheses (e.g. "Jane Goldstein (MA) writes..") that person is in the Directory. If the name is followed by the entire state name (e.g. "Jane Goldstein of Massachusetts writes...") then that person is not in the Directory. We are happy to forward mail to those whose addresses are *not* in the Directory. If you want us to forward the letter without reading it, mark the *outside* of the envelope with writer's name/description and the issue number. If you want us to read the letter and then forward it, please enclose another stamped envelope.

When you send us an address change for a subscription, please remind us if you are in the Directory, so we can change it here, too.

Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used; if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

CA, North (zips 94000 & up) — Michael & Tammy BILLECI (Joseph/86, Christina/96) 607 Arcadia Terr #202, Sunnyvale 94086 (change) ••• Marie Kay HANSEN & John HAMILTON (Patrick/86, Christopher/87) 15564 Rancho Ramon, Tracy 95376 ••• Francesca & Jeff PERA (Aidan/87, Eliana/91) 3639 Webster St, San Francisco 94123 (change)

CA, South (zips to 94000) — Caroline MERRILL (Jonathan/87, Ryan/89, Paul/91) 1245 N Dartmouth Av, Claremont 91711 **(H)** ••• Moira & Dana YOUNG (Drake/88, Raleigh/92) 865 Millstone Av, Santa Maria 93455

FL — Robert PINKERTON & Dotty FLOWERS (Chris/90) 800 Emma St, Key West 33040 **(H)**

IL — Mark & Lisa FOWLER (Amanda/85, Ashley/88, Zachary/89) 2208 Valley Dr, Lindenhurst 60046 ••• Donna LAKEN & Russell WOLF (Kai/92) 2628 Newburg Rd #251, Belvidere 61008

IN — Rick & Jackie STOUT (Kevin/83, Laryn/85, Ben/87) 10479 Bishop Cir, Carmel 46032-8599

IA — Bruce & Julie BAINBRIDGE (Kathleen/88, Elizabeth/90, Jonathan/92) PO Box 4, Teeds Grove 52771

KY — Cherie CARROLL & Jimmy GADD (Nicole/82, RJ/89, Cody/91, Jaime/94) 600 Shake Rag Rd, Waynesburg 40489

ME — Debbie CHRISTO & Jason FIELD (Zachary/74, Gus/90) RR 1 Box 2820, Exeter 04435

MD — Deborah & Lewis SMITH (Kelley/90) 7813 Jeremy Terr, Derwood 20855

MA — Jennifer & Mark HAZELTON (Christopher/90, Nina/92) 24A Calamint Hill Rd N, Princeton 01541 ••• Maureen KARLE (Michaela/87) 44 Governor's Way, Barnstable 02630 ••• Patricia ROBERGE (Jesse/81, Gabriel/86, Asia/91, Willow/92, Autumn/94, new baby/96) PO Box 1604, 25 Fresh Meadow Dr, Orset 02558 (change) ••• Howard & Marion WEBSTER (Jakey/90) 8 Concord Rd, Acton 01720 (change)

MN — James & Tamara BRYCE (Cameron/83, Beryl/85) 18620 Fairlawn Av, Prior Lake 55372

MO — Bill & Jan PIERCE (Sonnet/76, Naomi/80, Eva/82) 36001 Nathan Ln, Eldridge 65463 (change) **(H)**

MT — Mary Ellen CARTER & Kevin SCOTT (Anna/86, Molly/89) 10825 Sleeman Gulch, Lolo 59847

NJ — Karen & Stephen KURTZ (Brian/87, Hillary/90, Joshua/92) 23 Old York Rd, Turnersville 08102 ••• Debbie & Ed MILLER (Kaitlynn/91, Hannah/94) 13 Riverview Terr, Belle Mead 08502 **(H)**

NY — Matthew & Judith GARRISON (Ellen/77, Kent/83, Ruby/89) PO Box 103, 10 Thorpe Av, Hammondsport 14840 **(H)** ••• P.A.T. & Bridg HUNT (Selina/81, Martin/85) PO Box 28, Shelter Island Hts 11965-0028 (change) ••• Hank & Jane ROBERTS (Jacob/81, Mary/85, Will/92, Lucia/94) 253 Coddington Rd, Ithaca 14850 (change) ••• Donna & Tariq TAHIR (Dean/90, Sabrina/93, Noah/95) 128 Hillcrest Av, Yonkers 10705

NC — Sheri & Bob CLEMEN (Taylor/79, Bethany/81, Layne/84, Robin/88) 4812 Montvale Dr, Durham 27705

OH — Diane & Jim BIDIGARE-CURTIS (Danielle/91, Luke/91, Hannah/93) 9095 North St NW, Newark 43055

OR — Zarisah SPAIN (Nathan & Jemila/93) 1270 W Hilliard Ln, Eugene 97404

PA — George & Jan ALEXANDER (Christopher/79) 137 Rutgers Av, Swarthmore 19081 ••• Karen LAWSON & Lawrence KARPEN (Sarah/91, Max/92) 1004 Drexel Av, Drexel Hill 19026 ••• Diane MIGLIACCI & Ramon PEREZ (Michael/81, Justen Diana/83) 1126 Wood St, Bristol 19007 (change) ••• Peter SCUDNER & Theresa WILLNER (Cara/89, Evan/92) 2117 Waterford Dr, Lancaster 17601 ••• Merrily WILLIAMS & Richard SUMMERS (Abraham/82, Elise/89) 230 S 21 St, Philadelphia 19103

SC — Beth & Russ HILLEKE (Katie/91) 2425 Spring Garden St, Charleston 29414

VT — Sue ANDREWS & Bill CHRISTIAN (Jonathan/89, Matthew/91) RR 2 Box 42, Pownal 05261 ••• Meghan & Patrick KEITH-HYNES (Bronwyn/92, Aidan/93) RR 1 Box 283, Brookfield 05036 **(H)** ••• Chris & Gina KROL (Emily/88, Adam/91, Jeremy/93) 41 Vine St, Burlington 05401 (change)

VA — Gregory & Shelley ROBBINS (Kaitlyn & Matthew/86, Chelsea/89, Jillian/92) 2718 Woodfern Ct, Lake Ridge 22192 **(H)** ••• Eric & Cindy SWOVELAND (Jason/79, Justin/82, Ian/86, Brett/87) 1704 Scoup Ct, Chesapeake 23320 **(H)**

Canada —

Alta — Anne BROWN & David CEBULIAK (Noah/89, Emma/95) PO Box 178, Bragg Creek T0L 0K0 **(H)**

Ont — Kathleen DORNER & Daniel SULLIVAN (Elizabeth/83, Debbie/95, Margaret/87, Noah/94) 170 Main St, Ottawa K1S 1C2 ••• Margaret & Don SIMMS (Richard/87, Matthew/91, Grant/94) RR 1, Carrying Place K0K 1L0 **(H)**

Other Locations — Beryl NELSON & Bipin INDURKHYA (Xela/90, Althea & Bela/95) 2-24-48-305 Nakacho, Koganei, Tokyo 184 **Japan (H)**

Groups to add to the Directory of Organizations that was published in GWS #108:

CO — Colorado Home Educators' Assoc, c/o Jolinda Lauderdale, 19871 E Prentice Ln, Aurora 80015; 303-441-9938 ••• Rocky Mountain Education Connection, c/o Valerie Berg, 1495 Riverside Av, Boulder 80304; 303-449-5916

LA — Coalition of Arkansas Parents, PO Box 192455, Little Rock 72219; 501-565-6583

MA — ALOHA (A Loosely Organized Homeschool Assoc), c/o Hazelton, 24A Calamint Rd N, Princeton 01541 508-464-7794

National/General — Home School Association for Christian Science Families, 445 Airport Rd, Tioga TX 76271

Address Changes:

NY — New York City Home Educators Alliance, PO Box 1214 Murray Hill Station, New York 10156 (same phone #)

PA — Diversity-United in Homeschooling, 1126 Wood St, Bristol PA 19007; 215-788-3837

Helpful Schools — Pinewood School, new phone # 303-670-8180

Other Organizations — La Leche League Int'l,

(next page)

ENTRY FORM FOR DIRECTORY

Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS.

Adults (first *and* last names):

Organization (only if address is same as family):

Children (names/birthyears):

Full address (Street, City, State, Zip):

Are you willing to host traveling GWS readers who make advance arrangements in writing? Yes ___ No ___

Are you in the 1996 Directory (GWS #108) Yes ___ No ___
Or in the additions in a subsequent issue? Yes ___ No ___

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Delete - Family Home Educators of Dallas

Pen-Pals

Children wanting pen-pals should write to those listed. Please try to write to someone on the list before listing yourself, and remember to put your address on your letter. To be listed here, send name, age, address, and 1-3 words on interests. ••• Micaella KINZLI (9) 57 Hoagland Rd, Blairstown NJ 07825; gymnastics, skiing, reading ••• Yonatan McCARTER-RIBAKOFF (5) 1432 Sebastian Way, Sacramento CA 95864; Power Rangers, Spiderman, karate ••• Sara SLUSZKA (13) 77 Bailey St, Coxsackie NY 12051; horse training, travel ••• Mary BOWDEN (14) 821 S Cooper Rd, New Lenox IL 60451; trumpet, shopping, music ••• James HARRISON (13) 4645 Watertank Rd, Manchester MD 21102; writing, gymnastics, music ••• Scott CROSS (15) PO Box 13, Macksburg OH 45746; baseball cards, cards ••• John SITA (10) 928 W Elm St, Springfield MO 65806-1928; word puzzles, comedy ••• Grete PALSMEIER (12) RR 1 Box 185, Winfield KS 67156; writing, drawing, art ••• Zachary HOYT (10) 44 Raymond Hill Rd, Raymond ME 04071; aeronautics, nature, reading

Writing to GWS

Please: (1) Put separate items of business (book orders, directory entries, letters to GWS, etc.) on separate pieces of paper. This helps us get them to the right people more quickly. (2) Put your name and address at the top of each letter. (3) If you're writing to a specific person, write "GWS" or "Holt Associates" on the envelope in addition to the individual's name.

How to write letters for publication in GWS:

1. Handwrite, type, or dictate your thoughts and send them in on paper, on a cassette tape, or on a 3.5" disc that can be read by a Macintosh (send the hard copy too).

2. There is no #2! We have no formal submission procedures, so rule #1 is all you need. Do tell us whether it's OK to use your name with the story (it's fine to be anonymous instead) and do bear in mind that we edit letters for space and clarity and that we often have much more great stuff than room to print it in a given issue, so it can take a while before something gets in.

The best way to get a sense of what kind of writing gets published in GWS is to look through a few issues. In general, we prefer writing that is in the first- or third-person ("I did this" or "She did that") rather than in the instructional or prescriptive second-person ("You should do this..."). We like to hear about what people did or tried, what did or didn't work, what they've observed or concluded or wondered as a result. GWS stories focus on how children learn, particularly how they learn outside of school settings, and how adults learn, particularly how they tried something new, figured something out, or made their way without school credentials. We are always interested in stories about how homeschoolers meet and deal with common issues – negotiating with a school district, pursuing a particular interest, learning to trust oneself – to name just a few.

We're always interested in responses to writing that has been published in the past, and GWS is often an ongoing conversation among its readers. Because there isn't much time between the day you get an issue of the magazine and the day the next issue goes to press, responses can't always be run right away, but we do try.

Most of the time, readers don't need a special invitation to write to GWS; just follow rule #1, above. When we are planning to have a section of an issue focus on a specific topic or question, we write or call people ahead of time inviting them to write on that topic. These are readers whom we suspect (based on previous correspondence) have experience with the subject or something to say on the topic. The more we hear from you, the more likely we are to know what you might be able to write about and thus the more likely we are to think of you when a particular topic comes up. For our regular Focus section, we ask kids who have written in the past, kids who have said they would like to write, and – mostly – kids chosen at random from the Directory and pen-pal listings. If you want to be asked to write for an upcoming Focus, drop us a card, or, better yet, write a GWS story about something else (your thoughts or experiences, your response to something in a previous issue).

We love hearing from readers whether or not we are able to publish the story, as all letters give us valuable information and food for thought.

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Book Reviews

The Amazing Fruit Fly Circus videotape
#3276 $19.95 + $4.50 s/h

This one-hour documentary focuses on a school in the Australian outback that centers its curriculum around putting on a full-scale circus. The video often cuts between the circus's performances and its practice sessions, so we get to see the kids working something out and then doing it live. The kids, ages 6-19, perform all sorts of acrobatic stunts, slapstick clown acts, juggling, spectacles of dance, gymnastics, and costume, all synchronized to the original score of a live band. We also get to see the kids help with setting up the Big Top and caring for the props, playing in between performances, putting costumes and make-up on, sleeping and joking on the bus rides, and, in the final scenes, saying goodbye to graduates of the program. The older kids work with the younger kids, real circus acrobats show the kids how to perform, and a general spirit of cooperation and teamwork pervades this tape.

I especially like how the video visually captures both the satisfaction of personal accomplishment (watch one of the kids' faces when she completes a handstand on top of four chairs balanced on four empty soda bottles) and teamwork (look at all the kids' faces as they pile onto each other on a moving bicycle).

This is the sort of school that would have a hard time finding support in America today. After all, charter schools are being criticized for using uncertified teachers; imagine the public outcry if a circus performer were listed among the faculty. But this school has done just that since 1979. It's a good example of how we can help kids learn by daring to do something different with them.

– Pat Farenga

The Secret Door (board game)
#3308 $15.95 + $4.50 s/h

We've owned this game for years, and the fact that all its pieces are still in the same box should tell you how much we enjoy it. The premise of the game is similar to the card game Concentration: 24 cards representing Valuables are placed face down, and then three are removed and placed behind the secret door. Then the cards are turned over two at a time by each player. When two cards match, they get removed, until someone correctly guesses which three cards are behind the secret door.

In this game, unlike in Concentration, you play as a team or by yourself against the clock, rather than against one another. Let adults be warned: this game is harder than it looks, because it is possible for there to be two of the same Valuables hidden behind the door.

I've played several software programs that use this memory and matching concept, but none is equal to this wonderful board game and all are more costly and, to me, less interesting than this clever, tactile, interpersonal variation. We have enjoyed playing it with children as young as 4; the rules also suggest a good variation for playing with even younger people.

My wife, Day, also thinks this game helps develop memory skills in a better way than similar games do since the board has pictures of interesting rooms with objects in them onto which you can put the cards. This gives visual clues so that kids can remember the cards' locations by associations. Day helps the kids remember where a card is by encouraging them to think of an association like, "The yellow gold is on the yellow brick in the basement."

Finally, I asked Alison (6) what she likes about The Secret Door and she said, "It's hard to do because you don't know where the matches are. It's sort of complicated because you have to finish before the clock runs out. I like to play it by myself and I like playing it with friends." – PF

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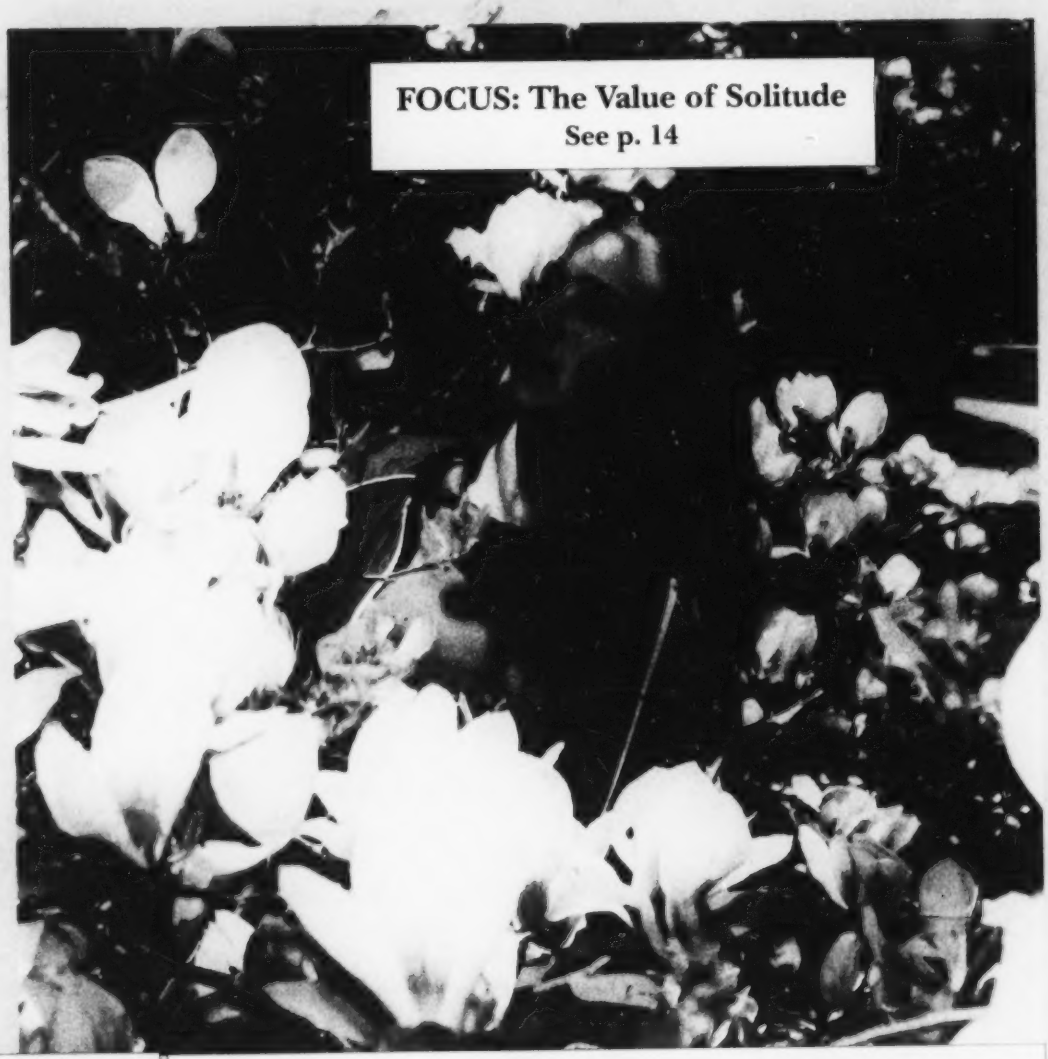

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Finding Teachers **Reading, Music** **Family Meetings**

Mothers After Homeschooling **Explaining Homeschooling**

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Issue #111
Jun./Jul. '96

GWS

Founded in 1977
By John Holt

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In this issue

A 19-year-old told me that her friends sometimes ask her how she has managed to have such a strong, healthy relationship with her boyfriend. "It's hard to explain it," she said to me, "but I really think it has to do with how well I know myself." What allowed her to gain this self-knowledge? Her homeschooling years, she said (she left school after eighth grade).

I promise I'm not making this up just because it sounds good. She really did make that connection, and I knew immediately that I would have to write it here. No doubt many things about homeschooling can lead to self-knowledge, but I've suspected for a while that the simple opportunity to spend time by oneself, with oneself, has a lot to do with it. All the GWS Focuses interest me in some way, but every now and then we hit on one that really seems to get at the heart of what this enterprise (homeschooling, or GWS, or just growing up) is all about. This issue's Focus on the value of solitude is one of them. As each response came in, it amazed me how, without any prompting on my part (I'd just asked them if getting time alone was important to them, and if so, why), contributor after contributor brought up self-knowledge: "Being alone helps me understand how and why I'm feeling the way I am," "Being alone allows me to see who I am without having to impress anyone else," "[I value] the freedom to dream, to get to know myself, to reflect on my life."

I won't quote them all, since you can read them in full later in this issue. But the cumulative effect is impressive. The young people talk about getting to know themselves both emotionally (working out their "emotional snarls," as one put it, and their relationships with others) and intellectually or creatively (reading and doing research, designing a project, developing story ideas). It struck me that even the one respondent who said he didn't particularly like or need to be alone still chose to be alone when he wanted to concentrate on reading, which at this point is still hard for him. Solitude still had value even when it wasn't his first choice.

We spend a lot of time in homeschooling publications showing how homeschoolers have opportunities to interact with others, and of course that's important. But these young people make such a strong case for the value of solitude that I think we should consider this a wonderful advantage of homeschooling, something to describe proudly rather than with any sense of embarrassment. Yes, it's true that most school students don't spend as much time alone as these homeschoolers do. But I think the homeschoolers would phrase it as, "The school kids don't *get to* spend as much time alone as I do." In this issue, they talk about how much they'd miss solitude if they didn't get it. They talk about what a beneficial effect it has on their relationships with others and how it gives them renewed energy for group activities. So the value of solitude is part of the answer to the socialization question, a part worth stressing in any conversation or even in our own reflections. – Susannah Sheffer

News & Reports

Access to School Activities in Florida

From an article in the 3/14/96 Orlando (FL) Sentinel:

Some homeschooled and private school students will be able to take classes part time in Seminole County (FL) public schools next year.

In approving the new policy, the School Board acknowledges a growing trend toward alternative education. Few other school districts in the state allow such an option. The new policy is based on one in Alachua County.

School Board members said they want to expand services to more of the community. Although the board doesn't expect a flood of applicants, some families have expressed an interest in part-time school attendance.

The policy opens classes to all secondary education students but is directed at high school-age students, said Marion Dailey, director of instructional support services. Part-time enrollment is more difficult in lower grades because, among other reasons, some middle school class times change during the year, she said.

... Part-time students must register before the start of a semester. They will earn grades and class credit, and must abide by school rules. They must provide their own transportation, and principals will determine when they will arrive and leave.

... Monte Hancock, chairman of the Florida Parent-Educators Association, said Seminole County's new policy is unusual and he has mixed feelings about it. Parents will have more options, particularly regarding classes they are not qualified to teach, Hancock said. But, he said, parents may be tempted to compromise their commitment to a home education program. Even part-time classes at school could shoot a hole in the day, he said.

... School districts across the state have had to deal with the fast-growing number of home education students.

The Florida High School Activities Association last week approved legislation to allow homeschooled students to participate in athletics as of June 1. The vote followed months of discussions among FHSAA officials, state legislators, and home education advocates.

Harder for Homeschoolers with Disabilities to Get School Services

Teddi Sobin wrote in GWS #100 that she and her son Nicholas had signed an Individual Education Plan with the school district which stipulated homeschooling, with private occupational and physical therapy paid for by the school district. Teddi now writes:

The Santa Fe Public School district has decided to limit services to children with disabilities who are homeschooled or in private schools. My 9-year-old son Nicholas has a communication delay as a result of a stroke suffered during surgery to correct a heart defect. He has received direct therapy services from the school district for three years, while we were homeschooling.

This past fall, I felt that because of his communication delay it was extremely important for him to develop his social skills, and there were no homeschooled kids his age in the area, so I enrolled him in a private Montessori school. I placed him there after searching the public schools for appropriate placements and finding nothing. He still has need for therapy to support his educational progress, and this is documented in his Individual Education Plan. The Montessori school accepted him with the understanding that the school district would support his placement with therapy.

Then, as a result of a decision by the U.S. Department of Education in response to an appeal from *Albuquerque v. New Mexico State Department of Education*, the Santa Fe School District now says that no direct therapy services will be offered to children enrolled in private or home schools. In spite of the fact that the decision comes from the federal government, I believe it's wrong. IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, is civil rights legislation designed to eliminate discrimination against children with disabilities by school systems. Yet this new loophole condones discrimination against a small group of children based upon their school placements.

One option we have is to enroll my son in public school, but I believe that would undo all the progress he's made in the Montessori school, where he feels safe and essentially designs his own program. Other options parents in this situation have are to obtain therapy services privately and pay for them out of their own pockets or through insurance; receive consultations from the district and try to do the therapy themselves; lobby to pass a bill in the state legislature that requires school districts to provide services, paid for by the state. Or file a class action lawsuit, which I'm ready to do because I am extremely frustrated by this situation. Are there any other parents out there in a similar situation?

Cooperation with Local Library

Phoebe Wells (MA) writes:

Our family's relationship with our local library, the Cambridge Public Library, began about eight years ago when I was regularly bringing in my public-schooled stepdaughter for special programs the library offered. The librarians quickly recognized that Meg and I loved good children's literature and so they always piled us with books and wanted to discuss them at our next visit. During one of these conversations, the librarian mentioned that my son Eoin, then 2, would be heading off to preschool soon. Having

just discovered homeschooling, I told Linda our plans. She was very intrigued, and the more she learned about homeschooling, the more eager she became to reach out to the homeschooling community. She soon organized an Introduction to Homeschooling night at the library and another meeting just for homeschoolers to share methods and resources. Both were well attended. Linda wrote up all the information generated at these meetings to create a Homeschoolers' Resource Notebook. In it she also kept current copies of GWS, local support group newsletters, and homeschooling catalogs. Many people consulted the catalog, and the library gained a reputation for being very homeschooler-friendly.

For the next three years, no one felt the need for more homeschooling programs, but the librarians did spend much time giving loads of informal assistance. That September, I noticed a sign inviting teachers to a discussion of the best in new kids' books. When I asked about it, Maeve, the librarian offering the program, explained that as a reviewer for *The Horn Book* (a magazine devoted to children's literature), she was able to recommend 20-30 new books, both fiction and nonfiction, to teachers interested in keeping current in this area. Because this sounded like such a wonderful opportunity for homeschoolers, I offered to do all the outreach if she would offer the same thing in a separate program for us (I didn't imagine the teachers would appreciate our kids and babies at their meeting). Maeve immediately agreed to do a Homeschoolers' Resource Meeting, soon nicknamed Maeve's Faves.

I publicized the meeting through our homeschooling group's monthly newsletter and phoned people I thought would be especially interested. The library also listed it in their monthly calendar of events. We averaged five to ten families per meeting, and we were very impressed with the variety and quality of the books. Maeve provided a typed list of each month's books and also gave us a lot of related information and recommendations. Maeve's wealth of knowledge about children's books and their creators made these meetings a big treat.

Children were always welcome to join the meetings, and several older ones did regularly. The younger ones looked at books or played with the library's toys or used the tables to play board and card games. Occasionally the kids got loud and disruptive, which only really bothered the librarians when parents wouldn't leave the meeting briefly to help resettle their children. I decided to print a reminder each time I publicized an upcoming meeting that we needed to remain responsible for our children and not expect the librarians to babysit. This seemed to help, and the librarians no longer worried that they were going to be taken advantage of.

While most families loved this program, a few did not find it useful. Since Maeve chose the books from whichever ones the library had acquired that month, and since she was primarily concerned with the teachers' preferences, at times none of the books would be suitable for one or more of our families. Often there were few selections appropriate for kids under 6 or over 12, and some materials were too school oriented and textbookish for our usual crowd. Some felt these book talks became unnecessary once the library provided a circulating copy of *The Horn Book*, which gives dozens of detailed reviews in each issue. Still, attendance remained high with most families feeling very excited about the new books.

Maeve's Faves continued monthly, except for summers, for two years until Maeve moved on to another job. I was prepared to announce the sad news that our meetings would soon end until Daryl, the head of Children's Services at the library, told me that after much consideration, the librarians had decided to cancel the teachers' meeting but to continue ours! She said the format would need to change because none of them read as many books a month as Maeve had. We held a planning meeting where we discussed ideas such as a scaled-down version of the previous format, discussing books by monthly subjects, Internet training, touring a local publishing company, and extending teachers' borrowing privileges to us. We ultimately decided on Internet training and a list of topics we wanted to cover in our discussion of books, including historical fiction, poetry, plays, stories set in other present-day cultures, and science.

We found this new format extremely helpful, especially with bibliographies specifically designed for us, since that meant that few of the stories featured school situations. The librarians also appreciated these meetings because they were an opportunity to focus on specific aspects of their collection. At times they found gaps they hadn't known existed, and at other times they discovered resources in other parts of the system they had never researched before.

A side issue that arose around this time was homeschool proposal writing (which we're required to do in this state). The library's notices had attracted several new homeschoolers who were asking for advice. I offered to compile a notebook of actual proposals used locally with names omitted. The librarians readily agreed,

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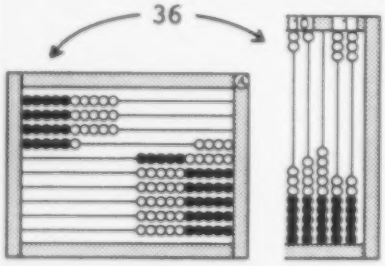

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and they added the notebook to their reference shelves. As another aside, librarians from other branches got to know us and offered us any help they could. One branch turned out to be a lifesaver when our theater group needed new rehearsal space. They not only lent us their lecture hall but even began a storyhour for all the little siblings of the actors.

At the start of our second year of topic meetings, we planned a new series to include music, biographies (especially of women mathematicians – yes, you can find quite a few when you've got a well-informed librarian to guide you!), math, and a very wide variety of arts and crafts. The initial meeting was attended by so many enthusiastic families that Daryl and I were surprised when very few came, even for the subjects they had requested. In our next newsletter, I warned that the program would be canceled because it was too preparation-intensive for just a couple of families attending. Motivated by the impending loss, many families returned for the end of the series.

At the last meeting, several people said they no longer needed nor had the time to continue monthly meetings and that we had adequately covered the major subjects of interest. We discussed a range of possibilities for the future, including new book updates again, introductory and/or networking programs again, guest speakers, and using the library for science fairs, art exhibits, and/or concerts. We will probably decide on a mix of these for next year, and of course the librarians will continue to provide the informal support we've all come to rely on. One thing we did agree on was that we are all very grateful to have librarians who are so knowledgeable, responsive, and committed.

Office News

[SS:] Since our last issue went to press, Pat Farenga has spoken to an enthusiastic crowd in California, we've had local representatives in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, and we're preparing to go to conferences in Massachusetts, Vermont, New Jersey, California again, and Arkansas later this summer. See our Calendar, below, for details, and note in particular that the New Jersey and Vermont events will take place just after you receive this issue of GWS. If you've been thinking of attending a homeschooling event, or if you have friends who might be interested in learning more, take advantage of these opportunities.

For years, we enthusiastically recommended Herbert Kohl's book *The Question is College*, and we were very disappointed when the book went out of print. It's still out of print, but the author has generously let us sell a few of the remaining copies to our readers. This is a fabulous book that helps parents and kids decide whether college is the right choice and demonstrates that there are many viable alternatives to college. Half the book is a handbook for deciding on appropriate apprenticeships and work, which could be useful even to younger homeschoolers. This hardcover book originally sold for $17.95; we're selling it for $15.00 + $3.50 s/h. Copies of this book are not available anywhere else, and there are no immediate plans for it to come back into print, so if you're interested, don't miss this chance to get one now.

For those of you who like to reach us via email, please note that we now prefer you to use our CompuServe address: 76702.3703@compuserve.com. We'll still get mail at the HoltGWS@aol.com address, but the CompuServe address gets checked a bit more frequently. Also, do bear in mind that we only have one staff member checking email. He then forwards your questions or comments to the appropriate staff people. If you need to speak to one of us right away, phoning or faxing will often be more direct.

In our last issue, we listed the area code of *The Drinking Gourd Multi-Cultural Home Education Magazine* incorrectly; you can dial 206-836-0336 or, if you want to use the 800 number, 1-800-TDG-5487. The address we printed was correct.

Calendar

June 22: Susannah Sheffer speaking to homeschoolers in **Burlington, VT**. Materials from John Holt's bookstore available. For info: Deb Shell, 802-524-9645.

June 29: Unschoolers Network conference at Brookdale Community College, **Lincroft, NJ**. Pat Farenga speaking, the Colfaxes, others. Materials available. For info: Nancy Plent, 908-938-2473. (note: this conference date has been changed; it is *not* on 6/6 as listed in GWS #110.)

Aug. 24-27: California Home=Education conference in **Sacramento.** Pat Farenga speaking; materials available. For info: Barbara David, 916-391-4942.

Aug. 24-25: Ozark Co-operative Warehouse conference in **Fayetteville, AR**. Susannah Sheffer speaking about homeschooling; books available. For info: Lee Sexton, 501-521-4920.

Aug. 24-30: First annual Not Back to School Camp for people aged 12-18, hosted by Grace Llewellyn. For detailed info, send $1 to PO Box 1014, **Eugene, OR** 97440.

We are happy to print announcements of major homeschooling events, but we need plenty of notice. Deadline for GWS #112 (events in September or later) is July 10. Deadline for GWS #113 (events in November or later) is September 10. ◆

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Finding Teachers Outside of School

Sarabeth Matilsky (NJ) wrote this essay for the newsletter of her local food co-op, where she works. Though it's written to explain homeschooling to a non-homeschooling audience, we've found it quite useful for new homeschoolers and for others, too.

I never sit in a school classroom. I'm a homeschooler, and the idea of a classroom with other students around me in orderly rows and a teacher in front is alien to me. Does that mean I have no teachers, that I don't learn from anyone? Does it indicate that I am deprived of an intellectual community?

Some people think so. Most recently, it was a high school English teacher who actually came out and said it. We didn't speak directly, but we were exchanging letters via a local newspaper.

Several months ago, I wrote a letter to the editor, responding to an article in which the writer had asserted that kids naturally "lose their thirst for learning" and it is a Mysterious Problem That No One Can Solve. I don't buy that, and in my letter I pointed out that I haven't lost *my* thirst for learning and I attributed this largely to my homeschooling. When the English teacher responded to my letter, he did not agree with me. He seemed to feel that I am worse off since I don't attend school and that I would regret homeschooling later in life. He stated, "... without a community of other thinkers and teachers, [Matilsky] may find that she has reached a lonely desert."

I want to address his argument, because I know that many people are critical of homeschooling for the same reasons he outlined. Part of this criticism is due to a misunderstanding of homeschooling; part of it may also stem from a narrow interpretation of what teaching means. So many people have this misconception of homeschooling: they assume that I sit home at my desk, reading all day (or else waiting for school to get out so I can "socialize"), with no human companions save my family. Others think that we school at home and actually create a little classroom in our house. Neither of these two examples is true, and a more accurate term to describe my education is "life schooling." I am out in the world, surrounded by those "thinkers and teachers" of whom Moran feels so sure I am deprived. In fact, to one degree or another, everyone I know is my teacher, and they're all definitely thinkers.

There are many different ways that I am taught. When I take a class, I am there to learn a specific skill or knowledge of a subject. As a student in my ballet class, for example, I am there for the express purpose of learning how to dance. When I take choir, I am in the class to learn choral singing techniques from one person, the teacher. These are two examples of when a conventional classroom setting works. But since it is my choice to take the class and I can choose to work with that particular teacher, my situation is already different compared with what kids in school are able to do (with regard to choosing classes) most of the time.

There are other ways of being taught, too, besides being instructed in person. For instance, this year I am working on writing by corresponding with the editor of the homeschooling magazine *Growing Without Schooling*. I send Susannah my essays and such, and she critiques my writing. But also, besides commenting on my writing, she offers her perspective on problems or concerns I might have about homeschooling or just growing up. She becomes a different kind of teacher then, and I can draw upon the experience of someone who's been around longer than I have.

I also learn indirectly, by observing others. And when I watch or do something alongside people, they often give me help or advice when I need it. I learned to cook primarily by watching my mother in the kitchen, and although she might have shown me how to hold the knife or fry the tempeh or wash the lettuce, neither one of us ever thought of it as a class. Similarly, last year at the ice skating rink, many of the skaters gave me tips on my turns or showed me a particular move. If I had a question, I'd ask the

person who I felt could answer it best. And if one of the other skaters saw me having trouble with a step, sometimes he or she would come over to me and help me to correct it. I learned a lot from the other skaters, but, as with the cooking, none of us felt like it was a class.

One can also be taught simply by learning with other people. My sister April and I are learning Hebrew together this year, and we have been getting together with two women friends to study. We are *all* teachers in this situation, although Liz knows a lot and the rest of us are just starting. We all remember different bits of information, as if we each have a few different puzzle pieces. So when we put those pieces together, we are closer to the finished picture than we would be if we were studying independently. Also, doing it together has gotten us motivated better than if we were doing it on our own. For example, if I see April reading the Hebrew book, I am reminded that I haven't picked it up for a week and should do so. The same is true if April sees me reading the book. Along the same lines, last year April, two of her friends, and I organized an informal science class once a week. I was the oldest, but I was not, however you look at it, the teacher. Together we decided what to do, and each of us would add something to our discussions. Some weeks we fooled around, and others we found out how much water objects displace when they float.

Knowledge does not have to be directed at one person exclusively for his or her benefit, either. A very useful way to find things out when no one else knows the answer is to read a book. Books are a very important resource for me, and I can usually find out whatever I need to know by reading. A few years back, when I was interested in learning about the history of clothing, I took a very thorough and inexpensive "class" by going to the library and checking out some books. Reading by myself, I could go at my own rate, and internalize things that I felt were important. That sometimes meant rereading a page over and over; sometimes it involved just thinking about a particular chapter; sometimes I skipped over a part I didn't find useful or interesting – and sometimes I wouldn't read at all for a month. I have learned other things this way as well; for example, I have learned how to do origami almost entirely with the aid of books, and the same goes for learning to make a hammock and many other crafts projects.

Beyond the specific teaching/learning arrangements I've described, there are also many times when I learn something less tangible, just by having a discussion with someone. Sometimes conversing with people is as worthwhile as reading, writing, or 'rithmetic. When I talk with my friend Betsy, I feel very uplifted. She has a way of looking at things in the world that I would like to emulate at times; she has a way of making things seem beautiful without becoming too idealistic, and at the same time, she does not lose her analytic reasoning powers. When I discuss a book I've just read with someone else who has read the same one, I hear a different point of view sometimes, which is always helpful. When I talk to Ginger while she's running the register at the co-op, I get more useful knowledge about politics than if I had a private tutoring session with a college professor. And when I have a conversation with a random shopper while I'm stocking cereal, I usually come away knowing something I hadn't before. Talking and listening to different individuals has given me a greater understanding of people, so they have all, in different ways, taught me. ◆

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The Benefits of Family Meetings

A long-time homeschooling mother describes how holding regular meetings helps her children set their own goals and helps the parents figure out how to assist them.

Alison McKee (WI) writes:

Over the years, my husband David and I had established a pattern of meeting with our kids three or four times a year to discuss their upcoming plans. These meetings gave us an opportunity to sit down with the children and take time to listen to their ideas and goals for the immediate future. We generally called the meetings when we sensed that either child was losing the thread that seemed to hold his or her life together.

By sitting down with the child who seemed to be floundering, we were able to discuss the life changes that we saw taking place, and these discussions seemed to help the children get a better focus on what was happening to them and what they wished to see happen in the near future. By meeting's end they generally felt refocused and revitalized.

During the past four years, our family has been in the midst of upheaval. David returned to school to work on his Ph.D. and left his job to be with the children while he studied; I went back to work half-time for two years. Along with these changes, our children experienced the growth that adolescence necessitates, and in all of this, we unintentionally lost track of holding our academic meetings.

Then this past fall both children came to us and announced dramatic shifts in their plans. Georgina said that she'd like to go to high school next year, and Christian, who'd been planning to move to Yellowstone to work as a fly tyer and fishing guide, announced that he'd like to go to college instead. David and I were stymied by both announcements. In order to help myself understand some of what might have influenced such dramatic shifts in their direction, I turned to writing. I wrote letters to my sister (who also homeschools), to other homeschooling parents, and to Susannah at GWS. At Susannah's suggestion I reread a piece she had written in GWS #93, "When Schedules and Appointments are Useful." As I finished it, I realized that David and I had lost track of the academic meetings and that there might be merit in resurrecting them. David agreed.

Initially, our intent was to resurrect them with just Christian. Georgina's plans to attend high school, although a bit confusing, weren't going to take the detailed planning that college admissions would. At first, Christian was a bit reluctant to schedule a planning session. After we reassured him that the meeting was in no way an attempt to take over and manage his life, he agreed to give us time. He told us about his plans for college admissions and we helped him put those plans into a manageable framework. We wrote down lists of things he was thinking about: taking college boards, maybe taking another traditional science class or two at the local university, taking another English class which emphasized writing, finding out about financial aid, figuring out what to do about having no transcript, finding "the perfect" school to further his study of foreign language. As Christian's thoughts were clarified, we proceeded to organize his list and divvy up the tasks among ourselves. By the first meeting's end we had established a workable plan of action and agreed to sit down together in two weeks to see how each of us was progressing.

The form of subsequent meetings has been similar to that first meeting. We discuss new ideas that Christian is thinking about, offer him our opinions and suggestions, and then formulate a revised list of tasks to work on. Always present in our minds is that these meetings are being convened so that we can help Christian formulate and meet *his own* goals. For instance, at our first meeting Christian had requested that we purchase the Saxon *Algebra I* and *Algebra II* books. By the time the second meeting rolled around, I had placed the order but the books hadn't arrived. David suggested that in the meantime Christian might get a start on his math review by looking over the Saxon *Algebra 1/2* book we already owned. Christian agreed that this would be wise. At our second meeting, he asked us about which colleges we thought might be appropriate for him. He knew that he was looking for schools which would offer flexibility, study abroad, and good language programs. We suggested a few liberal arts schools we'd heard of. Our suggestions gave Christian enough direction so that he could follow through and do more research on his own.

Each of us seemed to be suited to particular tasks that college admissions requires. I took on the job of creating a prose transcript from the records Christian had maintained these past four years. David wrote a statement of our educational philosophy. Christian had to prepare for the SAT and ACT and begin the process of filing college applications while continuing to keep

pace with his full schedule of activities.

Within two months, Christian received a personal invitation from the Dean of Admissions at Kalamazoo College (his first choice school) to come for a campus visit. (It's important to note that Christian's unschooled life, including four years spent fishing and fly tying, are what attracted the dean to him. The school prides itself on finding unique, top notch students.) Yesterday Christian returned from his visit. After meeting with admissions officers, attending two classes, dining with a German professor, and staying in the dorms, Christian says he feels confident that he will be selected as a student for the fall of 1997. I can't help but think that the time we've spent in academic meetings has really paid off. Not only has Christian had a successful college interview experience, but he's gained a deeper appreciation for his unschooling experiences and the work we can do together in an effort to support one another.

Now to back step for a moment. When Georgina had come to us with her plans to go to high school, we had suggested that she might think of doing some preparatory work before next fall. Our experience with Christian made it clear to us that academic meetings could also help Georgina formulate and work toward her goals. Her initial response was to refuse our offer. She feared we would take the driver's seat and tell her how to go about preparing for high school. Although we had some specific ideas about what we thought she needed to do to prepare, we assured her that she would be the one who would come to the meeting with *her* plans. We insisted that she try at least one meeting and that she was in charge of the agenda.

We half expected her to come to that first meeting with a resistant attitude and an agenda of plans to try out for every drama event in town. Instead she surprised us by presenting us with a carefully written list of academic goals. She had plans to continue working on basic math, reading, and writing along with goals that were directly linked to her aspirations to become more involved with local theater groups. We didn't need to help her reformulate much of what she had written, although we did suggest that she might take things at a slower pace. By meeting's end, she understood that simply adding rigorous academic study to her life without removing some of the activities that keep her so busy might be a formula for disappointment. She decided to keep her initial plans intact but to make modifications as time passed. Two weeks later, when we met again, she was delighted to report that she'd kept up with her plans.

At each subsequent meeting, Georgina reviewed her academic progress (mostly math work with some reading and writing thrown in). As she did so, she began to discover how capable she is, and, ironically, her desire to attend high school began to fade. She is also discovering that academics are not the only thing of value in this world. Her work with a local director in rewriting a script, working with a professional actress in preparation for a two-person dramatic revue in the summer, being an assistant to the assistant director in a local theater group, and spending huge amounts of time studying monologues, Shakespeare, and a wide array of plays and playwrights seems to remind her that life and life experiences are what really matter, not a high school experience.

Clearly our meetings, in which she planned ways to gain theatrical experience and to work on her math skills, have helped her discover her own special abilities. As she experiences new opportunities for growth within the context of her theater work, she seems to understand that she is just as capable as her schooled peers. She has discovered that she is academically capable, but more important, she has discovered that authentic work of her own can be just as valuable. Christian, likewise, has discovered that his unschooled life is valued by colleges, and he is confident that he'll succeed in that arena. Finally, David and I have been reminded that the essence of unschooling is that our children find their way in this world and that we be there to help and guide them. ◆

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Challenges & Concerns

Living Through Child's Illness

Kathryn Miller Ridiman of Kentucky writes:

Last week I sat frozen with fear in my pediatrician's office, numbly listening while he ordered blood tests that would determine whether our "miracle baby" – born after nine years of pregnancy losses – had leukemia or thyroid disease. I drove home in a mental fog, too terrified even to cry. My husband and 7-year-old daughter were curled up on the couch reading when I stumbled in the door with my baby girl in my arms. They listened quietly while I explained what was going on. We then drove together to Children's Hospital where an exhaustive series of tests were performed. It was excruciating to have to endure my infant's screams as she was being subjected to painful tests. My older daughter Mandy was concerned and anxious, but we knew that excluding her from what was going on would have been even more damaging to her. Her father took her for a walk during the more invasive procedures. Mandy has a quick and vivid imagination. Allowing her to participate as fully in life as possible is less frightening than what her fertile imagination might conceive of. Mandy was compassionate and gentle with her little sister, playing with her and able to coax a smile from her when no one else could. She was particularly empathetic to Tabby's plight because she has spent a great deal of time at the hospital herself.

We gratefully fled home when the medical ordeal was over. I was particularly happy that we are homeschooling because we could put aside all other considerations while we dealt with this current emergency. It felt right and appropriate that Mandy did not have to deal with school, classmates, homework, and artificial schedules. I could take time to focus on nurturing us past this painful time in our lives while we waited for the test results. I could not imagine having to pack Mandy off to school while she wondered what was going on at home. (I have a younger brother with leukemia. I vividly remember trying to function in school while my world at home was crumbling.) Mandy played happily with her neighborhood friends and her sister. She painted and colored pictures. We talked about how the blood in our body protects us from disease. We pretended small pillows on the floor were dangerous microorganisms. Mandy pounced on them and engulfed them in her arms, pretending to be a white blood cell. We discussed how blood cells sometimes don't work correctly – no one knows exactly why – and people can get very sick, like her uncle, but they don't *always* die from leukemia. Her father talked about how he makes chemotherapy in the hospital pharmacy to help people with sick blood. We looked up the circulatory system and the thyroid on the computer anatomy program. We rolled pennies out of our charity jar and donated them to cancer research. We practiced some creative visualization and talked about how important the bond between the mind and body is. We talked about important things that I have no answers for, like why do people die, why do people get sick, do angels have to take baths and do they molt like birds. We spent a great deal of time lying on the bed and snuggling while the laundry piled up and dishes cluttered the kitchen. We spent time doing what was most important then – being with each other.

The days crept by. The blood tests were negative, and my precious baby is OK for now. We have more tests to endure in future months, but we will face them together as we have met other challenges – as a family. Homeschooling grants us the freedom to attend to that which is most important in our

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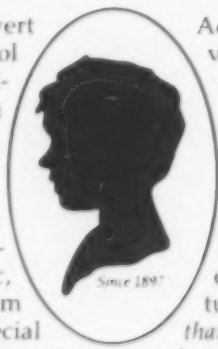

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lives: our family, our friends, our community. There will always be time to do the dishes or learn the multiplication tables. There are days when we do involved projects or attend exciting classes in the community, and there are days when the thing our family works on is nurturing and supporting each other. Life is not always easy and predictable. However, integrating homeschooling into our lives gives the entire family a safe base to operate from, a haven from the outside world, and permission to attend to that which is truly important.

Explaining Homeschooling to Grandparents

Andy Migner (MA) writes:

Recently, after enjoying an (absolutely stupendous) homeschooling theater production that two of my children had the privilege of acting and singing in, my mother said, "I'm glad I came. I don't feel so sorry for your kids anymore." I didn't know that my mother had misgivings about our homeschooling. She had graciously kept her opinions to herself. A couple of days after the play, I was inspired to write to her. My letter to her said, in part:

I've been thinking about your saying that you were glad you came to the play because you feel less sorry for my kids. I'm so glad! I didn't know that you were feeling sorry for them. I think the idea that the kids are stuck at home with their parents all day is a misconception about homeschooling that has come about because there are some homeschooling families who desire to isolate their children from the world. While there is a lot in the world that I don't think is fit for human consumption (especially young children's), this is not our motive for homeschooling. Our primary purpose is to allow our children's enthusiasm and excitement for learning to remain strong by allowing them to pursue what is of interest to them (on their timetable, not somebody else's). As long as their confidence and enthusiasm are not broken, I think they're learning wherever they are and I'm not partial to having that learning take place with me. Christopher and Taylor spend a good deal of time outside the home with other children and adults: at Cub Scout meetings and activities, gymnastics classes, soccer practices and games, the Puddlejump Players [the youth theater group whose performance my mother had seen] rehearsals, performances and social gatherings, homeschooling activities and field trips, not to mention all of the informal time they spend at friends' houses (both schoolers and homeschoolers) or riding bikes and playing sports in the neighborhood.

It seems to me that the socialization they experience is better than what they would be getting at school. During the week, when they go over to one of their homeschooling friends' houses, they usually spend the full day or at least half the day there working on projects of mutual interest where they can work, play, and talk uninterrupted for hours. Their schooled friends find very little time to really talk or do things together at school, and then they are limited after school by homework and what's left of the day. I've found that in their activities with school kids, there is a division between boys and girls and by age (or grade), as well as some mean spiritedness and general acting-out behavior. All of this is conspicuously absent (or at least highly unusual) in their homeschooling friendships and group activities. Also, their relationships and communication with adults tend to be very relaxed and cooperative, without the adversarial edge that you sometimes see in kids whose lives are more regimented (by adults). Among our friends, which include many other homeschooling parents, there is a wealth of diversity and talent. And the adults are very interested in sharing their time and talent with the kids. So, the kids are exposed to scientists and artists, writers, photographers, dancers, musicians, mechanics, organic gardeners, retail salespeople, businessmen, etc.

To give a more specific feel for this, one day last fall Christopher and Taylor spent the day with a scientist friend of ours (and her children), studying tidal pools in Maine. This same woman has included the boys in

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other natural and physical science activities and projects. When Christopher became excited about jewelry making, the photographer/jewelry making friend of ours who had introduced him to it was very generous in offering his time and expertise. Christopher has thought about the possibility of pursuing an apprenticeship with this talented man.

I'm enclosing one of the boys' progress reports to give you a feel for how they spend their time. I think they are getting a terrific education, developing strong friendships, values, and self-esteem, and living a much more relaxed lifestyle than the norm. So what's to feel sorry for?

Anyway, I'm glad you came to see the play and were able to get a little bit of a feel for all of this. I wish you had seen the cast party. For three hours, the boys and girls (aged 2 to 13) danced, sang, and played games *all together*, unselfconsciously, without incident and with tremendous *joie de vivre* and care for each other. Even though this is the norm in our homeschooling gatherings, I still marvel at it. It leaves me with a tremendous sense of rightness and peace about the choices we have made and are making in our lives.

Andy also comments:

The idea of sending my mother a copy of one of the boys' progress reports came in the middle of writing the letter. I vaguely remember reading in GWS of someone else doing this either with a grandparent or with an unsupportive spouse (or perhaps ex-spouse). I don't like having to write progress reports, but I am always impressed in reading them over how much we really do in simply living our lives. And I think that sharing these reports occasionally with concerned relatives could be useful.

... and Explaining to Acquaintances

[SS:] A friend of mine, a long-time homeschooler, wrote to me about the feeling that when other people meet her and learn that she's a homeschooler, they form their impression of homeschooling in general based on that meeting. This is sometimes a hard burden for each individual homeschooler to carry; it puts a lot of pressure on the one conversation. I thought perhaps my comments in response would be helpful to others, too:

I do of course know what you mean about people judging the whole idea of homeschooling by what you say to them in one conversation. ... In those conversations where you're trying to explain homeschooling, it may help you to distinguish between *homeschooling*, as an option or an educational practice in general, and one particular *homeschooler*, you. Often, when people ask *you* questions about your life, they're really wondering about and trying to understand homeschooling in general.

So, for example, suppose they ask you whether you are learning a foreign language, and the answer happens to be no (I don't know whether it is or isn't in your case; I'm just picking an example that could be true of someone). Ordinarily, you might say, "No, I'm not," and feel a little bad because it seems as though the person is concluding that that's a weakness of homeschooling. But what you can do in such a situation is to let the listener know that although you, as one homeschooler, don't happen to be doing such-and-such, *homeschooling* as a practice does indeed allow for that such-and-such to happen, and you can take advantage of the opportunity at some later time. For example, you'd say, "I'm not studying a foreign language right now, but there are all sorts of ways I could do that, because other homeschoolers have hooked up with native speakers, used language tapes, written to overseas pen-pals, sat in on classes, etc." Same for anything else. One could say, "No, I don't play team sports, but I know homeschoolers who play on community teams and others who play on the school team." See how that leaves the listener with the understanding that just because you don't happen to be doing whatever it is, that doesn't mean they've just discovered a weakness of homeschooling? And, therefore, it doesn't mean that you have to worry that the entire practice is being judged on the basis of your answer and your experience.

Adjusting to First Year

Diane Hendry of Ohio writes:

When I started homeschooling my 6-year-old daughter, I knew I was going to be taking on a huge task. I would be solely responsible for her outcome. I wouldn't be able to blame the school system for its inadequacies. In order to do my important job, I read every homeschooling book available, made copies of curriculum and forms for planning, turned my enclosed front porch into a school, and worked out schedules: 9:00-9:30 for math, 9:30-10:00 for phonics, etc. I even planned days for special classes: Monday for Art, Tuesday for Music, etc. I made out daily lesson plans, and documented what we had done with journal entries.

I had successfully brought school into my home, but was this what I wanted for my daughter? Granted, I was providing one-on-one instruction, she was not exposed to negative social behavior, and I could insure her academic success. But what happened to the other reasons I chose to homeschool? I wanted her to use her creativity to discover the world with the excitement she had as a 4-year old. She had lost it after she went to kindergarten; homeschooling was supposed to bring it back. Three months into my first year of homeschooling, it wasn't working.

Then I attended a wonderful seminar on interest-based education. I attended twice. I finally started to realize what I was doing wrong. First I eliminated the schedules and lesson plans. I found that my daughter was fantastic at math, when she wanted to do it. She could read a whole beginning reader book if she was in the mood, instead of the hair-pulling frustration she felt at reading a page when I told her to. So I gave her tasks that we needed to do each day, but told her that she could pick the order. This worked for a while, but the end of each day would come and some of the things on the list wouldn't be done. She was too busy creating projects, becoming Peter Pan, telling exciting stories, and thinking. She was doing everything I had hoped, and yet, "We have to do math and reading every day," the little voice in my head kept saying. That little voice was going to make sure I felt guilty enough to keep putting us through hell.

Then, somehow, I started incorporating learning into our everyday lives. Cooking became a valuable math lesson. Playing store was a fun way to learn about money, competitive pricing, advertising, and reading. Learning opportunities were everywhere. I watched my daughter act out scenes from books we read. We read picture books about other countries and situations that piqued her interest to learn more. Those wonderful questions that used to drive me crazy finally started coming again: "Why doesn't the Kool-Aid spill out of my glass when the ice cube melts?" brought about a discussion and experimentation about water expanding when frozen.

I have now realized that less truly is more, especially with our homeschooling. We still have a few standards we adhere to, enough to keep that little voice appeased:

Daily I read aloud two picture books; then she reads to me. Every night I read from a chapter book. She writes at least one letter to someone weekly. Each week she picks a topic that we will learn about in depth and we get books from the library, draw pictures, etc. There are always "educational" things available, like painting, puzzles, math worksheets, games, crafts, etc., whenever she is bored. I will answer any question she has, whether through encyclopedias, books, or some other method.

My daughter has learned volumes since I learned to relax. My "first grader" can recognize members of the Big Cat family by their various spots, knows that shrimp is in the crustacean family, and can add and subtract three-digit numbers. She understands the concept of fractions, can identify some of the states by their shape, and is learning German. Boy am I glad I threw away my lesson plans and got back to natural learning.

"Could we learn how the Blackfoot Indians communicated with the white man?" is her latest request. I guess I shouldn't be too surprised. A picture book whet her appetite; now it's up to me to satisfy it. Off to the library we go! ◆

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Focus

The Value of Solitude

We asked young GWS readers, "How important is it to you to spend time alone? What do you like to do during that time, and what do you get out of it?"

Practicing Basketball; Designing Pottery

From Alec Young (GA):

Spending time alone not only gives me time to reflect, which allows me to know myself better, but it helps me engage more fully in social situations. When I'm playing basketball alone, I see areas in which I need to improve without worrying about what someone else sees or thinks of me. When I'm alone, I tend to concentrate on my weaknesses. If I'm competing at all, I'm competing with myself.

Then, when I'm playing basketball in a group, I need to show off my best stuff, so that I will be picked for the next 3-on-3 game. I believe that playing with others is just as important. I see new weaknesses that I need to work on next time I'm doing drills by myself. I'm challenged by new styles of play. I'm surprised by new moves and ideas. But all of this is even more fun because I have already taken the time alone to observe my game and work on it so that I am a better player.

This is not only true with basketball. By being alone and thinking through a subject or problem or project, I form a more honest opinion or plan than I might in a group. When I'm alone, I'm not intimidated by other ideas. However, it is also important to exchange ideas to hear different perspectives and see different ways of looking at things. But I'm a more articulate participant if I've had time to think the topic through on my own.

When I'm starting a new pottery project, I need time alone to design, plan, measure, and make any necessary stencils – to work out the problems of construction. Then, when I'm in the studio constructing the piece, I like to have other people around. I like to hear their suggestions and ideas. I like to see what they're making. If someone comments on my work, it might send me in a completely different direction. Both the time alone and the time with others are important to my creativity and output.

The bottom line is that you need a balance. I feel that in our society, especially for people my age who are in school and are herded from one activity or classroom to another, it's much more difficult to find solitude than it is to find time with other people. To achieve and maintain a balance in that situation, you probably have to make more of a conscious effort to seek out time to be alone. Because I am homeschooled and have more control of my time, I feel it's easier to take that time for myself whenever I feel I need it.

"Solitude is a True Companion"

From Clare Murphy (PA):

"I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude." – Henry David Thoreau.

I may be a gregarious person, but I, like Thoreau, have never found a companion better than solitude. Being alone allows me to see who I am without having to impress anyone else; it allows me to lose myself in books and papers without having to worry about entertaining anyone else; it allows me to think.

I'm the youngest in a family of three children and I watched as my brother and sister, around the age of 13, began working in their own separate rooms instead of in the living room or kitchen. They'd turn on their classical music and read or write alone. When they needed help, they'd descend from their "studies" to ask Mom for assistance. I didn't think I would ever enjoy working alone in my room, but, lo and behold, around the magic age of 13 I also ascended the stairs to work in my room. We needed (and I still need) our own space in which to concentrate and our own worlds to escape into.

This summer for five weeks I stayed in a college dorm (as part of a summer program) with a roommate. Although we got along very well, I realized by the end of the second week that I needed that time spent alone in my own room. Whether I was inside my dorm room or outside of it, I was constantly around people. So, to get the time alone I needed, I would stay in my room on Sundays, when my roommate was at the beach, and write or read. Solitude seems to re-energize me, allows me to enjoy my time with people more.

So I mostly study when I'm alone, or, more precisely, I seek solitude to study. This means that I spend a good percentage of each day either in my room or at the local university library with only my books, computer, or paper. I have a hard time concentrating on a book or piece I'm writing when there is another person in the room, even if he or she is also studying. A person constantly brings me back to reality when I want to be in medieval England or concentrated on taking the derivative of a function. I don't feel like I'm reaching my full potential for absorbing knowledge unless I'm alone. Of course, there are other ways to learn, such as discussions and conversations, which are also a vital part of my life, and I definitely can't do those things alone.

Solitude often has unpleasant connotations of loneliness and abandonment, but I never associate these with being alone because through my mind I'm connected indirectly to the human world. Solitude is a true companion. When I'm physically in solitude, my mind revisits the lives of historical people, what my math professor said about integrals, how Dickens constructs his scenes, and what the point of life is. I sometimes lose that inside voice when I have to split my mind between itself and the outside world.

I need to associate with people, but I also need a balance of time alone. A variety – being in a large group of people, being with just one friend, and being by myself – assures me that my life won't become, on one extreme, superficial, or, on the other, provincial. And solitude itself keeps me rooted in reality, allows me to reassess where I am in life and where my next step is.

Taking a Break from Other People

From Alex Huffman (CO):

I think it's quite important for me to have time alone. I get to think about things like what I can do if I'm bored, or I think about things from the past that I really care about. Sometimes I go into my own fantasies, and that helps a lot. For example, during my time alone I've been able to get ideas for designs of boats and airplanes. I like to create a design and then create a little miniature story that goes with it. That's what I mean by going into my own fantasies, and I also like to take time to not worry about anything else around me for about fifteen or twenty minutes – just time to get away in my mind.

I manage to take time alone every day – just about any chance I get. It can vary from taking a bike ride to going to my room. When there are a lot of other people around, it's especially important to me to get some time to myself. If, let's say, all my older sisters and their kids come for a visit, I would eventually get stressed out if I didn't have some time to myself. So I go into my room and lock the door. I think other people understand this; my sisters sometimes need time alone, too. When I get stressed out, I get grumpy, but if I take some time in my room, I come out feeling more refreshed and ready to handle more things.

I often have very chaotic days with a lot going on, so having time alone is very, very valuable. In fact, I think that if I didn't have some time alone just about every day, I would go out of my mind.

"To Discover What I Believe In ..."

From Dillon Wright-Fitzgerald (PA):

As a homeschooler, I spend more time alone than most teenagers, reading, studying, dreaming. Some weeks I spend the better part of my days in my room, feeling free as a bird. I'm in control of where I direct my energies, and I've never felt more free than when I'm deep in the midst of a book I'm reading for "schoolwork" and suddenly feel an uncontrollable urge to write something in the form of poetry. I slam the book shut and go from sitting upright at my desk to sprawling on my bed, quickly seizing a notebook and letting words seep out of my pencil while I wait for them, calm, pensive, and inspired. Once they're down on paper, they're out of my mind, and I can go back to my reading, refreshed.

When I think of what I get most out of being alone, it's the freedom to dream, to get to know myself, and to reflect on my life. The thoughts become tangible when I write in

Through time by myself, with myself, I've found some answers and am still searching. It's made my outer life much more interesting and my inner life much deeper.

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my journal, something I've been doing since I was 7. It's a place for me to pour out anything I've been obsessing over, to laugh and cry, and to gain perspective. There's an aspect of me that is thrilled with discoveries made in the outside world among people, and there is an aspect that couldn't survive without time to sort through and dream about my discoveries.

It's hard for me to imagine what *not* having this time would be like, since I've always trusted it would be there. I shared a room as a young child, but there was always somewhere in the house I could go to be by myself. Now that my family lives in the country, I have much more terrain for quiet, solitary walks and a room all to myself, something I couldn't do without!

There have been times when I've been so intensely involved in something outside of the home that I felt I was hardly getting enough meaningful time for myself, although I was enjoying the experience I was involved in. Last year I spent a week visiting an uncle who works at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. I'm a violinist, and very passionate about music, so I had a wonderful time going to concerts, watching rehearsals, meeting people, exploring the campus and the music library, and getting to know my uncle better. Before going to bed each night, I felt an overwhelming need to think about and sort through the day in my mind. I hadn't noticed before that having this reflective time meant so much to me, and when I could only get it at the end of a busy day, it surprised me how eager I was to have it.

Last summer I landed a part in a play at a professional theater nearby, and had rehearsals every day for two weeks, seven hours a day. It was a new feeling, having to be somewhere every day, and I found when I came home each night, dazzled by the intensity and exhilaration of it, I couldn't lose myself in dreams or relax like I was used to. The show was my life, and it was hard to think of anything else; it *was* a little overwhelming. The only relief I got from obsessing over the production was by reading, and when I finally got time to myself, that's what I did, since I needed to *stop* myself from thinking about the play to be able to really relax. It may sound like the whole experience was a little too much for me, but I think the opposite is true; I needed to be intensely involved in something, since I felt it balanced all the time I usually spend alone with my dreams. Once the production was over, I had plenty of time to myself again, and in the fall, I auditioned for another play and had another intense, wonderful experience.

I'm much more comfortable when alone, and I tend to be cautious and reserved when I'm around people who don't know me very well. I do have a few friends I'm very close to, and I'm sure I'll find more. Somehow, once you're aware of yourself, you become aware of someone else, and I've found that having a true knowledge of who I am has helped me to accept other people and to bring warmth to relationships. At this point in my life, it's absolutely necessary for me to gain some identity, to discover what I believe in and feel strongly about. This is something I want to have time to think about *now*, not after I've finished homework or when I'm out of college. Through time by myself, *with* myself, I've found some answers and am still searching. It's made my outer life much more interesting and my inner life much deeper.

Helps Him Concentrate

From Timmy Boas (FL):

When I'm reading, I can't concentrate when other people are around, so I have to be in my room and I have to close the door. It's not that I want to be alone but that I need to be alone to read, because I can't read all that well and I need to concentrate more. If I knew how to read better, like my sister Amber, maybe I could read and not need to be alone to concentrate.

Sometimes when I'm bored I go up to my treehouse and I find stuff to do up there. But I don't go up there to be alone; I just happen to be alone when I'm up there. I'd be just as glad if someone else came up there to play too.

I'm also alone when I do mowing. Sometimes I listen to music, but mostly I just concentrate on what I'm doing with the mowing.

I don't feel a need to be alone. Sometimes I don't understand why people need to be alone because I don't feel I do.

How She Defines Herself

From Rebecca Beirne (Australia):

I spend a lot of time by myself (as much as is possible with two brothers and a sister!). When I think about it, I realize I'm probably on my own for at least five hours many days. Much of that time is spent in pleasure reading – at the moment, *The History of the Earth* (by Hartmann, which I highly recommend), *Sophie's World* (Gaader), Doonesbury comics, *Reviving Ophelia* (Pipher), assorted newspapers, magazines, etc., and specific "learning reading" such as *The Odyssey* and material about microbiology and physics. As

well, I swim for about an hour a day and that also gives me time to myself for thinking. I'm sure it keeps me sane, for although I love other people, I am very happy with who I am too.

Although our whole family homeschools, I set my own timetable, rise before everyone else, and determine my activities for the day. Sometimes people are in and out of the room we call our homeschool study, but on some days when the younger kids are at music with Mum and my older brother is at work, I'm quite alone. I don't mind at all, because when I'm researching set questions and investigating new topics, I find I do better on my own. I spend that time thinking about lots of things: the perfect society, careers, university, science, etc. Having a broad knowledge base is important in our house because there are always lots of different things that someone wants to discuss, and I like to contribute to all the discussions and arguments.

I work well in silence; it's very conducive to thought. I often can't concentrate on my work if there are lots of other people in the room. It seems to me that although perhaps students learn to concentrate when they are together in large groups in the classroom, the situation is not like the real world where people have offices or at least cubicles for special, non-group tasks.

In my opinion, it is very important to be alone sometimes. People who have to be around other people all the time might not be able to relate to themselves. This is emphasized from what I've read about anorexia and bulimia, that liking yourself rather than being dependent on what others think of you is very important. This has become more obvious to me with my contact with my friends at athletics. They never seem to be able to endure being alone for one minute. It is as if they don't feel whole unless they are bonded with an entire group. Although it is good to have lots of friends, they seem to define themselves entirely in terms of others. I find being in one clique is limiting and I can get on with any group but do not need to be affiliated with one of them, whereas the others see being "groupless" as social death.

I've never really had to consider *not* having time alone. I think I would definitely miss it.

"There's No Acting or Pretending"

From Sunshine Lewis of Florida:

Being alone is very important to me. Every day I try to get someplace where I can be by myself, even if it's taking out the trash. Some days I don't get a chance to be alone at all, and some days when I'm tired or worried or crabby, I need a little longer. When I have more time to myself, I usually read, paint, or draw. Somtimes I just sit and think or make up stories. This time by myself gives me a change of pace, a chance to regroup or prepare for whatever comes next, and general peace of mind. I'd definitely miss being alone if I didn't get a chance. I'd probably be a different person! I'd be a whole lot more crabby, and I probably wouldn't be as nice as everyone thinks I am. I'd be more disorganized in my mind and in my personal space.

Sunshine Lewis

I think that if you can get out in nature when you want to be alone, that's best. If not, think about nature or something that'll make you smile and forget about everything else for a little bit.

If I have a difficult decision to make and everyone around me has an opinion, if I can go be by myself and think about all the opinions, I can figure out what I think I should do. I had a decision to make when I was part of a dance troupe and we had been doing a lot of fundraisers because we were planning on going on a trip to Orlando. The fundraisers were bringing in money, but the cost of the trip seemed to be getting higher, and a lot of people decided they didn't want to go after all. The teacher said she couldn't refund people's deposits, and some people started to doubt this teacher. Other people, like me, weren't really sure. Also, I had a bunch of other things going on at the time, and the dance classes and the performances and the fundraisers were getting to be a problem. A lot of people had an opinion about whether I should keep doing dance class or drop out. I finally decided to stay with it, and thinking it through by myself helped me.

Being alone helps me be myself because when I'm alone, there's no acting or pretending. I'm being the real me. When I'm tired and things are really getting on my nerves, or when I'm angry, if I'm around other people I'll try not to show it that much, so I don't take out my anger on other people. But when I'm alone I can figure out why I'm angry, and sort of talk to myself about it without worrying about other people getting angry too.

Taking Time for Reading and Composing

From Jeremy Young (AZ):

I love to talk and joke with my friends (some of whom are grown-ups), be with my parents, and pet my cat. But sometimes I want to be alone, too. For example, sometimes when people have been yelling and my ears are ringing, I take alone-time to get some peace and quiet. I can remember one day when I went to my swimming class, totally unaware of what torture awaited me in the pool. The kids yelled, screamed, and paid no attention to the teacher at all. My ears hurt so much that when I went home, I spent the rest of the evening alone.

I like to take time alone even when I haven't been experiencing sound torture. Sometimes I just feel like reading, resting, or doing something else by myself. For example, about a year ago I got really interested in the explorer/geologist John Wesley Powell. He was the first person to travel down the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon of Arizona. Try as I might, I couldn't find a book about Powell's childhood. When I finally did find one, I was so interested in it that I read it every spare moment I had.

Usually I take time alone even when I'm not being tantalized by a pet project or tortured by noise. I have two favorite things to do at times like this. One is read library books. My favorite is *Amy's Eyes*, by Richard Kenney. It's 437 pages long, and it's the longest book I ever read. I wrote a letter to the author, telling him that I had loved his book, and he wrote back to me (in his own handwriting!). It was one of my favorite experiences ever. The other thing that I like to do when I take time alone is compose music on the piano. I really love it, probably even more than reading books. I plan to be a professional composer when I grow up. Currently I'm working on a medley of my best pieces.

I do other things when I take time alone, too. I love to play video games, and I frequently pull out a toy or a game and start playing with it. I also enjoy making my own board games and cardboard models, playing in the snow, and watching backyard bugs.

I used to be much more of an introvert (someone who prefers alone-time over socializing with others). Nowadays, most of my friends are extraverts, and I'm more of an extravert than I was before. My interests may change as I grow up. I may become an extravert, lose my interest in composing, and stop my reading. But I hope I'll never forget the value of spending time alone.

"How and Why I'm Feeling the Way I Am"

From Jenny Boas (FL):

I like to spend time alone in my room. I have a wonderful room with a loft where I can go and not hear any noise at all. When I am by myself I like to read, watch TV, draw, listen to music, or just rest and think about things. Being alone for a few hours during the day helps me to relax, and if I am feeling upset about something, being alone helps me to understand how and why I'm feeling the way I am.

I think that for me, at least, being by myself for a while every day is very important. Some people in my family don't understand why I would need to be alone, and they come into my room when the door is closed. This really annoys me, because when I need to be alone, I need to be alone.

Helps Her Make Decisions

From Anna Edmundson (ME):

I generally like to get time alone every day. It used to be harder for me to get it, because I shared a room with my sister, but now she has her own room and I can pretty much get time alone whenever I want. Even before that, though, I could spend time alone in our yard. I think my family understands and respects my need for time alone; I think we all like to have that time. I would get pretty frantic if I didn't have it!

When I'm alone, I like to read, write, and just think – about problems, or just about what happened during the day, or even to spend time not really thinking about anything. Being alone helps me organize my thoughts, especially when I have a big decision to make. For example, once I was given parts in two different plays, both of which I wanted to do. The rehearsals conflicted, so I had to choose one, and it was important to me to have time alone to figure out which one I wanted to do more.

Having time to myself also makes me more ready to face other people. That might sound funny, but it's true. I took ballet for years, and I was the only homeschooler in a small class. I had known the other students for years, but sometimes I still felt like the odd one out, and it was sometimes a hard situation. Having time alone let me find myself, so that I wasn't trying to be someone else.

Helps Her Get Along with Others

From Maple Potts (MS):

I like spending time alone in my bedroom. It is the place I can go to be by myself and not be bothered very much. It is also the place where I accomplish a great deal. For example, I sometimes do my math and science in my bedroom when my brother and sister are making so much noise in the rest of the house that I can't concentrate.

I love to read. I can spend hours at a time alone in my room reading. Some of my favorite authors are Jane Austen, Agatha Christie, and L.M. Montgomery. I also enjoy writing letters. I have about twelve pen-pals. I usually write to my pen-pals in my room because it always helps to have some peace and quiet when writing a letter.

Pine needle basketry is a project I also work on in my room. I have been making pine needle baskets off and on for the past two years, giving them to friends and relatives for birthdays and Christmas. Many people who do a craft that requires repetitive motion watch TV while they are doing it. At my house we have not had a TV since before I was born, so when I make pine needle baskets, I listen to classical music and think.

Spending time alone helps me sort out my thoughts and think about all the events happening in my life. It also helps me get along better with other people. If I didn't get time alone, it would affect my personality. When I am mad, upset, or irritated, it always helps me to get some time to myself, so that I can calm down and sort things out. Spending time with my friends and family is very important, but so is spending time alone, and I enjoy being with my friends and family so much more if I have been able to have some time by myself. The key to it all is balance.

Creative Time, Emotional Time

From Joanna Hoyt (ME):

I love being with other people. I enjoy chances for discussion and debate with people of all ages, and I delight in long imaginative plays and in games of soccer and chess. But I also need time alone – a lot of time alone. I feel crowded and exhausted after a few hours spent with large groups of people, and I become tense and overexcited unless I get a few waking hours alone each day.

I've been fortunate that my mother also needs time alone and recognized the same need in me. My brother and I learned the concept of alone-time very early; if someone went into their room and shut the door, or informed you that they wished to be left alone outdoors, you did not bother them for anything except meals, emergencies, or prior commitments. And we were encouraged to go to our rooms alone if we were tired or hyper or our nerves were frayed, and also to take time for solitary projects and just relaxing. It is easy for me to get caught up when other people are around and to go and go without taking time to rest, reflect, and rejuvenate. While it is embarrassing at times when my mother suggests to me that I take some time out, I usually am glad of it afterwards.

Writing – stories, poems, letters, articles and journals – is very important to me, and must almost always be done alone. When I feel the urge to write I retire to my room where there are fewer distractions to disturb my concentration and draw my attention away from the process at hand. And I cannnot write well unless I also have solitary times when I am *not* writing or reading or drawing or working on other projects but am simply letting my mind wander. I call these "incubation periods," when I have time to develop ideas, shape analogies, and build on interesting phrases that come to my mind during the other, busier parts of the day. Indeed, when I am creating anything, I need quiet and space that nobody else will intrude on.

Solitude is also where I work out emotional snarls (there are plenty of those, now that I am 14 and seem to be changing too fast for myself to keep track of myself) and where I pray, meditate, and nurture my emotional and spiritual side. In my family we call this "E time" (for Emotional), and, while it does not always seem as appealing as reading, building, hiking, or playing with my brother, I find myself growing increasingly impatient and moody without it.

There is a constant struggle for balance in our family's schedule. My brother needs less time alone than I do and more time with other people; we have friends and relations with whom we greatly enjoy spending time, and always a myriad of projects waiting to be started or completed – building a solar cooker, stocking a 10-gallon aquarium with native fish and trying to reproduce a natural environment, mastering a new game called Queries and Theories, spring cleaning, making birthday cards for the friends and relations, and working on crafts for our homeschooling group's winter craft fair are some of our current projects on the waiting list. We have to keep talking with one another and deciding how to balance our differing needs and projects, and sometimes the process is slow and confusing. But in all this, we still need and try to preserve a space for some time alone. ◆

Watching Children Learn

Discovering Invented Spelling

Lisa Jackson of California writes:

A lot of Sage's (6) reluctance to do academic work is a lack of confidence, not a lack of skill. He's very hard on himself and afraid of making mistakes. Today a pen-pal letter came from a 5 1/2 year old who had written his entire letter using creative spelling, with a lot of mistakes crossed out and lots of reversed letters. Sage was fascinated, had me read it three or four times and show him all the words that "weren't spelled right." He was amazed that I could read them. He was very inspired and sat right down and began writing back. I dictated the spelling of the first sentence but he began sounding out words ahead of me and wrote "I COT A LIZRD YSTRDAY" (I caught a lizard yesterday) and I was literally astounded and he was so pleased with himself. After he finished the letter he picked out a rock from his rock collection and gift-wrapped it to send to his new pen-pal and is now asleep, having taken the letters and present to bed in the blanket fort he built this evening.

Learning to Read

Susan Nichols of Michigan writes:

The fall my boys turned 4 and 6 we enrolled them in a private school for gifted children. It was a small school with a maximum of 12 children in a class. We had high hopes for their education. I have read to the boys since they were babies, and I also have some wonderful early readers from England that I had been using with James (the elder son) for over a year, on and off, with Stuart (the younger son) usually looking on. The books are superb, with colorful, interesting pictures, a simple but funny and meaningful text, and a twist to the story at the end. We also have what's called the Extended Stories leaflet, which gives a much longer version of the same story and has the child's sentence highlighted so both child and adult can read together. There was no pressure on James, just an enjoyment of the books and the thrill of being able to read them himself using a few phonics (which he learned from me sounding the words out for him, not from worksheets) and words he had memorized.

That fall, when James was in school, I had the hardest time trying to convince the school of James's reading ability and his readiness to progress further. They told me he couldn't read. The reason: he would stumble over simple three-letter words. Therefore, in their opinion, he did not know these words. I asked James why he could read these words, and harder ones, at home but not at school. He replied that he didn't feel comfortable reading at school – no one had the time to really listen to the children read – and preferred to read cuddled up with me on the sofa. I wonder how many other "poor" readers in school have this same problem!

Stuart had always listened to his brother read and loved to pretend to read the books. While the rest of his classmates were slowly progressing through Hooked on Phonics, Stuart was really reading at home now. Even with less than ten children in the class, the teacher could not accommodate Stuart's needs and asked me to hear him read at home (as if I wasn't doing that already!). That's when I realized we were wasting precious time and money. We immediately pulled the boys out of school and began unschooling.

Now, less than a year later, at ages 5 and 7, both boys read years above their grade level. Stuart, at just 5, devours books, reading whole chapter books before going to sleep. They both enjoy fiction and nonfiction (I can't remember ever reading nonfiction as a child, except when doing a "project"). I daren't even think about the reading readiness worksheets they would have had to suffer if they were in school.

Martine Paran Palmiter (MD) writes:

I wanted to pass on this exciting experience before it becomes a distant memory. Also, I wanted to provide a story to lessen the anxieties of those who are waiting for their child to read. My son learned to read at almost 8 years old. In retrospect, I knew that this was an average beginning age for reading, with many children starting much later or earlier. However, I had the typical parent anxiety when at 7 1/2 my son could barely read "CAT" and "BAT" and could only recognize cap-ital letters. An unschooler at heart, I read a lot to him and didn't push too hard, but I did bring out those phonics workbooks every now and then, only to give up after moments of frustration on both our parts. I reassured my son that he would read when he was ready and that it would be like magic (that's what I had heard).

And it was! When he started to read, it was like a flash of lightning. I could see the flash of recognition in his eyes. He was actually astonished that he could *see* the words. I now believe it is a specific physical developmental stage that enables a child to see printed words. Also, possibly related to this growth stage, I noticed a general inward-turning in his personality at the same time.

In his first three weeks, he went from struggling with "CAT" to reading "laughing," "eucalyptus," "fight," and "shamrock." I wondered how this happened, and then I noticed that he

learned to read by context. I had read about this in Frank Smith's *Reading Without Nonsense*. Because my son had heard all kinds of words by listening to stories, he recognized the printed word after trying to sound it out. I watched him as he simply sounded out the consonants and tried one or two vowel sounds until he figured the word out. I felt it was futile to teach him all the various vowel sound combinations (dipthongs) because there are more exceptions than rules. We discussed mainly the consonant sounds, and I explained that the vowel letters were "breaths."

Now, a few months down the reading road, I noticed that he learns a lot of new words mainly by context rather than by the longer process of sounding them out. Also, I notice that he now has a better retention rate when he asks questions about a word. He only had to ask me once to remember, "What sound does -tion make?" I remember all those days of repeating "This letter makes the ___ sound," with no results. He just wasn't ready then. For new words that sound nothing like they're spelled, we laugh together when I say, "I told you English is a crazy language." I let him know that it is like cracking a code, but once you get it, it all makes sense. And once it makes sense, you can read! He is now begging to read the comics, street signs, packages, and magazines. He wants to read in bed! He is proud he can read upside down. He is just starting and is in no way a fast reader – yet. But he loves to read and he tells me proudly, "I taught myself to read."

Exploring Music in Different Ways

More from Susan Nichols:

At age 3 3/4, James was desperate to learn the piano. We had one and I played from time to time. Glancing through the classifieds one day (something I never normally do), I spotted an ad for Suzuki piano lessons. I knew that violin was taught that way to very young children, so I guessed 3 year olds could learn piano that way too. I was right. The teacher, a retired music professor, was wonderful. A year and a half later, when our younger son Stuart was 3, he started taking lessons too. Both boys astounded everyone with their ability. Last year, at ages 5 1/2 and 7 1/2, the boys were demanding another instrument. I have always wanted to learn violin. On the day I took the boys out of their private school to teach them at home, James asked, "Can we learn violin now, Mummy?" We all began taking violin lessons, using the Suzuki method. We all progressed rapidly.

That was last year in Colorado. When we moved to Michigan, I was faced with my most difficult challenge ever: two boys who refused to play either of their instruments. By this time I had read many homeschooling books and was determined not to force them to practice. My husband and I discussed what to do. We decided not to look for new teachers and to just sit back and wait. I continued to play my violin as often and for as long as I could. The boys, after seeing the stage production of *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, began dancing and singing to the recording for hours on end. They began taking a jazz class. We all listen to classical music and to the Suzuki tapes during some part of every day. We go to symphony concerts, and music (like reading) is seen as an important part of our way of life.

Gradually James has gone back to his playing. After reading John Holt's essay on practice (GWS #14), we abolished that word. For now, teachers are off the agenda. I help James learn new Suzuki pieces at his pace, not mine. He is working hard at learning to read music, sightreading pieces alone and with my help. We make music together on our violins and he often improvises while I hold the tune. It is so hard for me not to push and to just let him be, but it is getting easier, and as a result, music is becoming more fun and relaxed.

Stuart is still not playing at all, but he is listening, dancing, and singing. I can hardly bear to see his talent being wasted, but the new unschooling part of me knows that statement is just not true. His love of music is being developed all the time and one day, maybe, if he so desires, he will once again excel at making music himself.

If anyone has had a similar experience and has anything reassuring to tell me, I'd love to hear from you.

By the way, as I sit here typing this, the boys are busy setting up their stage for a concert, using the speakers, microphone and holder, and lights they have constructed from "junk." In a while I will hear them singing loudly along with the Monkees and Joseph megamix! They tell me they can't wait until they're older and can be on a real stage. They're too shy right now, they say. And I'm worried about them not taking music lessons! I'll learn – I hope!

Homeschooling Overseas: In South Korea ...

Gretchen Denniston (MA) writes:

Our family has just returned from a two-year tour of duty in South Korea. We lived in a nice-sized military post in Seoul. Our oldest daughter, Laurel, spent her senior year of high school attending the Department of Defense Schools. Our other two daughters, Sky (almost 16) and Autumn (11), have been full-time homeschoolers all of their school years.

The army post had a small group of homeschoolers – about fifteen families. Some were more active than others, but we met weekly for most of the two years. The group was informal; the meetings happened because the moms wanted the mutual support. Probably one of the biggest things we did as a group was to do several dramatic performances for the wider community. One of the teens got us started with a Christmas play. Then one of the dramatically talented moms directed several productions that really helped everyone to understand what goes into putting on theatre.

It seems like most of our families either adopted a child or did foster care. This added a unique flavor to our cultural experience. Dealing with the Korean agency taught us about social services, attitudes toward children, handicaps, and the whole range of childcare. Our family did short-term fostering for four different

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children. Not all were Korean; two of ours were infants of female soldiers who were being offered for adoption. It was nice to have my mature children who could help care for those four babies.

About how homeschooling was regarded in Seoul: middle class Korean families were very polite, but you could tell that the idea was incomprehensible to them. Education in Korea is similar to Japan: kids go to school five and a half days a week and have extensive lessons after school and during vacations. School is relentless once they get to the senior high years and prepare for college entrance exams where only 10-15% make the grade.

We didn't hide from the army school, and I served as the POC (Point of Contact) in the army community for homeschooling questions. The army is in the process of writing up a SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for how to handle school attendance, which would cover homeschoolers. The general policy was "live and let live," which was fine for our participants.

Sky learned the most conversational Korean because she found herself in an immersion situation when taking ballet lessons three days a week at a Korean ballet institute. Also, as a native English speaker, she had a few opportunities to perform on Korean television, to teach English. Others in our homeschool group got quite involved in this program – the teens especially.

My husband Perry worked the hardest learning Korean. He and a native Korean speaker worked out an even exchange of language lessons. They worked daily for a year and a half over his lunch period. He is not fluent, but knows a lot about how Korean goes together. All of us found Korean hard, but we all learned some.

... and in the Philippines

Candace Thayer-Coe writes from the Philippines:

We are a Canadian/American family living in the Philippines. There are very few homeschoolers here and very little interest in it. It is important within the Philippine social structure that the children go to school, usually to the same private Catholic school their parents attended. Legally children must attend school by 7 years of age. I have heard that some Catholic elementary schools will only take children if they have been in school since they were 3. They are expected to read and write a certain prescribed amount by age 6, and will be tested before being allowed to enter first grade in a private school. These private schools are very crowded; sometimes 40 children to a class. We have a smaller, expensive Montessori school in the neighborhood, but they are not very creative in their approach. It is debatable how close to the Montessori method they really are. There is also an International School, intended for expatriates, which is popular with parents planning college careers overseas for their children, and a British School, which operates only an elementary course and then expects that the children will be sent out of the country at age 12 for middle school and high school – certainly not our style. There is a private Filipino/American school where, I was horrified to hear, they paddle the children, and there are public schools too, but there is a very dividing social class structure here and these public schools are usually poorly funded and of inferior quality.

It is amazing to me that more people in the foreign community here do not homeschool. Most of the foreigners in our village bus their children an hour or more down the highway to the various schools offered. Our children, Christopher (11) and Amber Grae (9), have always homeschooled except when Christopher tried school at 9. In general, homeschooling has been easy for us here. Since we are not Filipino, the government cannot control how we educate our children, and we enjoy the freedom this provides.

The children's social life is vast and varied. Over the years they have made friends with children of many different nationalities. We occasionally find a homeschooler or two around, but usually they are from the foreign community and often move on to live in other countries. We all feel very close to our homelearning friends, so we maintain contact and friendship. One family now lives in London, so we visit them and join in their activities with Education Otherwise, the homeschooling group there. We travel yearly to Vancouver (where my husband is from), and there we have a group of homelearning friends who always provide us with needed support and inspiration. Here in Manila, we are friends with a 13-year-old homelearning Filipino/American girl and her single American mother, and Christopher plays soccer with a Filipino boy who comes from a Christian homeschooling family, whom we do not know very well yet. But although we have found the occasional homelearning friend here, we don't have a group to belong to, and we gain much of our support when we travel, and through books, newsletters, and penpals.

Recently, parents have been calling me, wanting more and more information about homeschooling. I have seen the attitude changing here very slowly; there seems to be more understanding of homeschooling even if people feel it is not something they would do. When people ask me about how I educate our children and I explain, they often say that our children are very fortunate.

There are no libraries here that we can use, so we buy books locally, when we can find what we want, and we buy books in North America and England when we are there. We have an array of friends, tutors, and outside classes from both the local and foreign communities to assist the children. We had a young Australian artist friend for a couple of years who spent hours with them. A British friend came once a week to explore science and do experiments, a Filipino artist and architect came one day a week. They have both taken classes at Future Kids, a franchised computer school from Los Angeles. Amber studies ballet locally and studies piano with a talented Belgian teacher. My husband and the children (Amber mostly) attend pottery workshops nearby with an accomplished master potter. Sports have fallen into place also with a new soccer team in our neighborhood that does not depend on school attendance. They have both played but it is Christopher's favorite, and Amber has

decided to take up baseball with another independent team.

Real-Life Math

Herb Hough of New York writes in response to Lyn Milum's letter in GWS #109, which was about how taking a standardized test left her daughter feeling badly about her math abilities:

The predicament of Lyn Milum's daughter is perhaps that she is still in a graded environment, both age-wise ("in tenth grade") and test-wise. And part of the problem with testing is our methods of doing it. If it were done in terms of days rather than hours and minutes, it might be more attuned to real life.

And what about math programs not having real-life problems, which Lyn also mentioned? Why should they? The place to find real-life problems is real life. And why go looking for problems? Isn't problem avoidance a better survival strategy?

There are two learning categories that are poles apart and that can affect one's concept of a problem: WINWIN learning (what I need when I need it) and SYMNI learning (someday you might need it). Another type of learning, TIFDYM (this is for developing your mind) is closely allied with SYMNI, and in fact is often used to further justify it. So when you go looking for problems, which type of learning is it for?

Here is a problem that perhaps has some real-world overtones. Suppose you need two dozen cans of pop for a party, and the store has it on sale at 5 cans for $1. How many would you buy? I've presented this problem to students and gotten mostly puzzled reactions. It doesn't fit into a word-problem mode – they can't peg it to a right-answer method for solving. (Whatever they themselves would do is the answer.) But this is the nature of real-life problem-solving. If they are "wrong," they may learn more from the experience than otherwise.

As I write this, I'm at a student dance at which pizza has been provided. I noticed that each pizza is cut into 4 x 6 rectangular slices and that there are eight pizza boxes. This was a real-life problem for the pizza planners. With almost 100 students at the dance, they must have figured on two slices of pizza per student. But, near the end of the dance, I notice that the pizza isn't moving. There are three boxes that haven't even been opened, and only half the pizza has been eaten. Then I realize something. The planners failed to consider that the dance was held right after lunch. Now, would you call this a word problem? I would call it a planning problem.

And how do you distinguish between problems and puzzles? Could some word problems be called word puzzles?

When someone gives you a problem to solve, it's really their problem, not yours. Why should parents (or anyone) be finding problems for their children? What is wrong with them posing or formulating their own problems? When they do this, exploring and solving the problems becomes much more meaningful. See S.I. Brown and M.I. Walter, *The Art of Problem Posing*, for the flavor and substance of this approach. ◆

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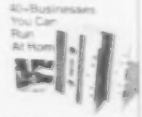

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Homeschoolers as Teachers

In GWS #110, 18-year-old homeschooler Abigail McNulty-Czapsky wrote about teaching a ceramics class and asked to hear from others about what happens when the homeschooling philosophy meets a more conventional teaching situation. We printed one response last time; here are two more.

Creates Her Own Rules for Karate Class

Sara-Rocka Ernstoff (MD) writes:

I teach a karate class and am also a homeschooling mother who unschooled myself for high school. When I teach the karate class, I start by explaining the rules. I do this for both children and adults. People like to know what is expected from them. I get very specific. Some examples:

You don't have to ask permission to use the bathroom; just go.

No one is allowed to talk during the class; if you're talking, you're not listening. If you have a question, raise your hand.

No one is allowed to hit, push, or touch another in any way. If you do, you will be told to leave the room.

This may sound overly strict, but remember, I am teaching a karate class. Safety and discipline are essential. When I teach art classes, I do let the students talk!

I explain that students have a choice: they can be in my class and obey the rules, or they can stop attending. Some children misbehave because they really don't want to be there. I will ask, "Do you want to be in this class?" If they say no, I offer the parents a refund. I only teach people who want to be there. If they say yes, then I explain that I will kick them out if they don't follow the rules.

I think it's important to realize that teachers have rights and responsibilities. We don't have to accept unacceptable behavior. The difference between us (you and me, Abigail) and a schoolteacher is that our students are free to leave at any time. Because we are not stuck with them, we don't have to put up with inappropriate behavior.

I feel so strongly about this that when I teach at a camp or school, I insist that attendance be voluntary. No amount of money is worth teaching people against their will.

My suggestion to you, Abigail, is to decide on the rules, regulations, and codes of behavior that would be conducive to the smooth operation of your class. Hand this out in writing, or review it with your students. Feel free to kick out anyone who can't get with the program.

My karate mentor once told me that if I had a discipline problem in the class, it was my fault. This was hard for me to swallow, but many years later I know he was right. No one can take advantage of me (ruin my class) unless I let him or her.

Because of my unschooling, child-centered philosophy, I differ from my teaching peers in many ways. I encourage my students to give me feedback. I take their suggestions seriously. I allow children as young as 7 to lead certain exercises. I speak kindly and respectfully, and never patronize children. When a student is upset, I allow him to express his feelings. Instead of saying, "Don't be a baby," I offer a hug. I never use humiliation or punishment and rewards to motivate. I do give positive feedback and encouragement, but that is genuine; I am a very enthusiastic person.

In short, I teach karate very differently from the majority of teachers I know. My point is that you can be a kind, warm, loving, respectful teacher and still have rules and a sense of decorum in the class. I should add that when I first started teaching, my students ran all over me. I didn't have a clue. But like anything else, with practice I improved and so did my students' behavior.

Tutoring a School Student

Sarabeth Matilsky (Nf) wrote to Abigail:

Last year (when I was 15) I tutored a girl who attends a well-thought-of private school. That fall, I had received a phone call from a teacher at the school who said that she had met me once before at a picnic and thought that I would make a good tutor for a girl in her fourth grade class. I was slightly dumbfounded by that, since I didn't remember ever meeting the teacher and I couldn't understand why she would want *me* to tutor the girl instead of someone from the school (which is K-12). But after thinking about it, I agreed to do it.

My job was to help Emily (not her real name) finish her homework. "Emily," said her teacher, "is very unmotivated to learn." She told me that Em didn't hand in her work on time, was very disorganized, didn't listen in class. It appeared to me as though my assignment was (in the teacher's opinion) to stuff knowledge into this girl's head as fast as I could.

Emily walked in to our first tutoring session very slowly, and deposited her book bag with a thump on the table. She was a large, nervous, and slightly awkward 9 year old. She hardly spoke, and I realized that she was scared – scared that I was going to be another person in her life who would tell her what she had to do, what she had to learn, when she had to learn it, and all without telling her why (or asking what *she* would like to do). So the first thing I did was to sit down and tell her that as much as possible, I wasn't going to do those things. I explained to her that I was homeschooled and told her a little bit about how I learn. I told her that as a tutor, I was supposed to make sure she did her homework, but that I would not be able to force her to do it, since I thought that most of it was silly and useless busywork. But most important, after our first "class," I told her that I thought she was smart. I don't think

that too many people say that to Emily.

But in the following months, we were necessarily going to have to plod through innumerable mimeographed sheets. And by tutoring, I would be doing something that went completely against all of my feelings about teaching and learning. During my first of several talks with Em's teacher, she gave me the usual speech: "Emily is such a bright girl and she just doesn't apply herself and it's so sad," and "You must be very firm with her. She will try to balk at doing her homework, and you must not give in. Setting a timer while she works is a good idea, so that way she'll have a goal. You can even bring her favorite game to play after she finishes her homework." While I was on the phone hearing these suggestions, I was completely confused. This woman was a teacher, and she was telling me things that I knew would never help *me* learn! When I got off the phone, I sorted out my thoughts. I knew that there was no way on earth I was going to sit there and tell Emily that if she could reduce 2/8 the lowest terms she would have a better life. I would never set a timer while she wrote out her spelling words. And playing a game as a reward – *well!* I didn't want to pretend to Emily's mother and teacher that I would do these things, and I didn't want to mess things up for Em by getting myself fired, because Emily liked me; I knew that. I think that I was one of the only people in her life who actually thought she was intelligent and gave her some affirmation that she wasn't alone in thinking that the schoolwork she had to do was dumb and meaningless for her in her life.

As our sessions continued, I knew that Em was not doing much better in school, since I saw all of the X's on her busywork sheets. But maybe it was enough for Emily's mother that now she didn't have sole responsibility for it – I could be held accountable for those red X's, too. (And I have to say that a couple of the X's *were* my fault. The directions for some of the lessons were so unintelligible. We would spend half the session trying to figure out how to do the problem, and I didn't have much experience in deciphering things like that. Several times I wrote notes to her teachers saying that the directions were badly written and if she or he wanted Em to do the work, we would need more information. They never responded.)

As much as I could, I tried to make the boring work a little more interesting. I brought in Cuisenaire rods, which Emily really liked, and we did some non-homework math that day. After I refused to ask Emily "reading comprehension" questions as she read to me (as her mother had requested), I brought in *The Education of Little Tree* and read it aloud. I told her about the science class that my sister and her friends and I were doing together, and we wished together that she could come. But most of all I tried to make it clear, time and again, that this work she had to do was not going to make or break her life; indeed, that it was not always important at all. If I could step back from it sometimes, it was almost funny (in a sad kind of way) how seriously the teachers treated these dumb little worksheets. It wasn't like they were real work or that those grungy pages held the information that Emily would need to succeed in life.

It was hard, like you (Abigail) said, to be the person in authority, the person who is supposed to be in control. It made it harder, however, to be in charge of telling someone to do something I didn't even think she should do.

But I think Emily liked our sessions, despite everything going against us. I think that she liked that I was honest when I spoke to her and I didn't pretend that I knew everything. When I didn't know what a word meant, we went and looked it up in the dictionary. If I didn't understand what a direct object was, I said so. I tried to help her see that even her teachers made mistakes, and that she didn't have to be embarrassed and try to hide it when she did, too. She was so scared of being wrong! She wouldn't try to have an organized way to figure out a math problem, or even grope around for a solution, because all the while she would be petrified of getting the incorrect answer.

Several times when Em would resist the schoolwork a lot, I would give her the option of stopping the tutoring sessions. I said I couldn't force her to do the work (and wished she didn't have to do it), but that I couldn't take money from her mom if we weren't doing (to some extent) what her teacher told us to do. She always said that she definitely didn't want to stop. I would feel horrible about it, though. If I kept on with the tutoring, I would feel guilty about making her do the work, yet if I stopped I knew that they would get another tutor, one who would probably ask Em reading comprehension questions and spend patient hours explaining why she had to do a ridiculous math problem with lollipops.

It was definitely enlightening for me to see firsthand what kids actually do in school, and I couldn't help contrasting that with our homeschooling. It was hard for me to see the enthusiasm and fun we had in our make-shift science class, and go from there to the dark library where Emily and I sat for an hour in a room filled with tension as she struggled through Social Studies and Current Events. I didn't blame her in the least for thinking that learning was completely boring, but oh, it was so sad to see!

I continued to tutor Em until last June, when school let out. Her mother and teacher didn't ask me to continue this year, and I wasn't surprised in the least. I heard from a friend who works in Em's school that she is now working with a 12th grade boy there, and I hope she's doing better with the schoolwork, for her own sake. I don't know and I probably never will, but I do hope I added something to Emily's life just by being her friend. ◆

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Mothers After Homeschooling

What does homeschooling mean to mothers after their children have grown up and left home? Here are two reflections.

Staying Connected with the Community

Vivienne Edwards wrote in the August/September 1995 issue of the Oregon Home Education Network's newsletter:

I am sometimes asked why I am still involved with homeschooling, since my daughters are now both in their twenties. There are several reasons. Probably the main one is that being on the "far end," I can see clearly the tremendous benefits of homeschooling, not only for my daughters but for myself.

I look at Michelle, my elder daughter, who is a successful photographer and who has run her own studio since she was 17. She specializes in wedding and portrait photography and is also community editor of the local newspaper. She had no problem getting into the photography course of her choice in a local college. She had been in a summer program in Audio Visual Arts and had an excellent recommendation from the AV teacher. No one asked for diplomas or transcripts. About six weeks into the first quarter, her counselor realized that her file was almost empty. She had a good conversation with the counselor about homeschooling, and they never did get to see her high school diploma. A pity really, because I had made her a nice one on our Macintosh computer. No matter! My artistic efforts were not wasted, because Leonie, my younger daughter, once needed hers.

Leonie did a wonderful apprenticeship as a dental assistant, beginning when she was 14. By the time she was 16, she was working full time as an assistant. She knew all the dental procedures and could also run the front desk and do billing and insurance. She considered going to dental assisting college, but after working 3500 hours she applied to the Dental Assisting National Board to challenge the exam. This was the only time she needed her Macintosh diploma. It was accepted without question, and she took and passed the five hour DANB exam when she was 17. Since then she has decided to become a dentist and is currently studying to get into dental school.

I look in awe at what these two young women have achieved. I wish I could claim some of the credit for what they have done, but I know the biggest thing I did for them was to get them out of school and set them free. During the years we homeschooled, I learned as much as, if not more than, my daughters. One of the most important things I learned was that you cannot ever "teach" anything to anyone. The best you can do is provide them with the opportunity to learn and encouragement over the tough spots. I also learned that things will be learned more easily when they are needed, and not before. Michelle very quickly learned how to write a business plan when she needed it, and Leonie learned to identify and label hazardous materials when she was asked to bring the dental office into compliance with Occupational Health and Safety Association standards.

Vivienne with Leonie and Michelle in Michelle's studio

I know that it can be scary to trust our children to know what and when they are ready to learn. Our society does not trust children with anything of importance, certainly not their own learning process. For the most part, children are treated rather like animals who have to be controlled at all times. We have a huge array of experts to tell us what kind of control is needed. It is almost unheard of for parents to be acknowledged as the only experts on their children.

Many parents get worried that they will not be able to teach high school. All you can do is help your children find environments where they can learn. This could be an apprenticeship, tutor, job, correspondence course, travel, neighbor, college, pen-pal, library, local business, volunteer job, museum, sport, vacation, ethnic neighborhood, church, family project – the list is endless, but all of these are valuable learning opportunities.

I stay involved because I would like other families to benefit from homeschooling as mine has. And since I began homeschooling my girls, I have met some of the nicest people and gained some wonderful friends. My only regret is that we didn't begin sooner.

Staying Connected with the Philosophy

Peggy Roberts (MA) writes:

I'm fond of telling the story about how I decided to take Emma out of school. Twelve years ago this spring, when she was losing heart in second

grade, I was in the shower – my favored place for reflection – grappling with family tensions. Using all known forms of bribery, from money to emotional blackmail, we had been forcing 8-year-old Emma (always, and still, a late-night person) into bed each night then yanking her awake in tears every morning, fighting over clothes and homework. We were negotiating an obstacle course of fear and exhaustion. Brooding on our miserable family dynamics, and there's just no other way to describe it, I was struck by lightning. It hit me (eureka!): We can just stop! Of course. Now. No more battles. No more school. The solution was so obvious, such a relief, that I never doubted its revelation for one minute.

Not least among the thrills and challenges of this decision was moving away from the center, onto the fringe of what I think I remember Nancy Wallace calling "blissful isolation" from the rest of the culture's expectations. An eccentric and fascinating man on the milk route where I worked (and on which Emma came during her years at home) loved seeing Emma with me and not in school. He said, "The most important thing she's learning by doing this with you is that she can choose another way."

When Emma left home at 16 to pursue independence and theatre work, I was traumatized, not only because I missed her company and because I was unprepared for such an early leavetaking, but also because I'd become attached to the image of myself in this homeschooling partnership. I'd used my role to describe my identity, the place outside the normal work and community routines where I felt important and comfortable. Beyond the loss connected with Emma leaving home, I was somehow cut short in what I conceived as my vocation: parting the waves and making a space for someone else to grow and learn.

It was some months, perhaps a couple of years, during which Emma came and went from home and during which we evolved the next phase of our relationship, that I came to see that identifying myself as a homeschooler did not mean I needed to play mentor, or coach, or parent, or guide, or resource for another person. That in fact, the experience of homeschooling, the metaphor, had become so much a part of my life that I needn't name it, needn't identify with it, needn't have a child at home for whom I was responsible. What I'd learned about learning, the way I'd radicalized my thinking about education, had shifted my direction forever.

I can best describe this shift through the story of this past season at a theatre where I've worked as a properties designer. Last year was a time of dramatic change in my life. There were several upheavals in my personal life and at the same time, I quit my publishing job and took on twin threads of work: a freelance editing job to run concurrently with a theatre props design job, which I hoped would give me time for outside work.

What I'd learned about learning, the way I'd radicalized my thinking about education, had shifted my direction forever.

I had been designing – i.e., choosing and finding and occasionally building – properties for theatre for many years, part time and freelance. Given the opportunity to work full time at a professional theatre, I decided to accept the job, knowing I was easily 20 years older than anyone else there and would be working in an atmosphere of intense physical labor over long hours. My closest colleague, the technical director, was a young, high-energy, brilliant inventor, with a frenzied working style and an opinionated, sexist way of relating. Miraculously, I still love him and admire his work, but he was a nightmare as a coach.

Because I was new to the building aspects of the job, I came into it humbly, even timidly, in awe of those who wielded their tools with the steadiness of the experienced. And somewhere along the line, due in part to my overextended emotions, an amazing thing happened: I came to understand myself as a failure. Steven (the technical director) reinforced my doubts. He was tediously patient, babytalking, when I asked questions, and if I attempted to start work without asking his advice, he'd walk past me, look at what I was doing and say something dismissive like, "You'll never be able to unfreeze those bolts using that wrench."

Watching Steven and the other technicians, judging myself against their expertise, and crumbling beneath their criticism, I became physically unable. I was so distracted I lost tools, broke glass, knocked ladders to the floor, injured myself with regularity, once managing to imbed a splinter so deeply in my hand that, a month later, I needed surgery to remove it. It took me 15 hours to hang a pair of drapes and swag them with pulleys. I fell off platforms. I cried.

The show went up. The work got finished. But for me it was a nightmare of humiliation, of incompetence, of feeling overwhelmed and anxious every waking hour, of jeopardizing friendships in my frenzied and fragile state. Then I went to bed with the flu and, after my father's death that winter (which added to my emotional upheaval), asked for the next show off.

Lying in bed and nursing my wounds, I found the titles of John

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Holt's books unaccountably running through my mind, years after I'd used them as resources: *How Children Fail, How Children Learn, Never Too Late, Teach Your Own.* I pulled them off the shelves, along with the collection of his letters, *A Life Worth Living*, and started remembering his voice, reas-suring myself as I'd done years before when working with Emma, that learn-ing is as natural as breathing, that we inhibit the process by demeaning the learner.

I don't entirely blame Steven or my co-workers for my failures, but on reflection, I realize that together we had played our work relationship into our culture's ideas about competence and success, teaching and learning: the strong and smart are in charge and the weak and unskilled are sacrificed to arbitrary standards and arbitrary deadlines. I gave over my power to my teachers and my inexperience and innocence placed me in stories I remember from GWS, of children in school, crippled by being judged unable by too-competent instructors, in a hurried environment. I'd taken a risk at a vulnerable time in my life, jumped in over my head, and fallen into a self-fulfilling cycle of fear and failure.

The break from the theatre, and this reflection time, woke me up. In addition, Steven, burned out by his schedule, left the theatre for other work, himself a victim of our roles and unrealistic pressure to perform. A little restored I returned, and spent the rest of the season teaching myself. Patiently, and one step at a time, focusing on believing I could do it, I could learn, putting into practice all that preaching I'd been doing for 12 years about how we can all learn what we're drawn to, left alone to find the way.

I didn't get terribly far. I'm years from becoming skilled with the building tools and materials to the level I'd like, but I met most of the deadlines, stopped hurting myself, found pleasure in the work, got help when I needed it, and didn't hate myself for what I couldn't know and gave myself credit for things I've been good at all along. Balance and attention. I found one new love, scenic painting, which I hope to pursue again next season.

For years I've admired the young people who write in GWS, and my own daughter, all of whom seem to have amazing clarity about what they want from life. I've envied their determination and regretted that in my youth (and, it's clear, later years, too) I strove to please others, to get the rewards for being a good student in class. More than once in this crisis, I longed to return to my typesetting job where I felt secure and the most competent person in my workplace, the teacher, the smart one. I needed reassurance that I could still be the most "successful" one.

I'm relieved I was able to steer clear of this little revenge and, coming up for air, return to the work I love, regardless of whether I can call myself a success by anyone else's standard. I guess in some ways this experience was my personal homeschooling epiphany – not so dramatic as the moment in the shower when I took Emma out of school, but a deep reminder that we're all (or well, at least I am!) vulnerable to the oppression of power in learning relationships at any time. ◆

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Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our last issue. Our complete 1996 Directory was published in GWS #108. Our Directory is not a list of all subscribers, but only of those *who ask to be listed*, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information - last name, full address, and so on. Tell us if you would rather have your phone number and town listed instead of your mailing address (we don't have space to list both).

If a Directory listing is followed by a **(H)**, the family is willing to host GWS travelers who make advance arrangements in writing.

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When you send us an address change for a subscription, please remind us if you are in the Directory, so we can change it here, too.

Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used; if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

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CA, South (zips to 94000) — Nancy FRIEDLAND & Alan MOSES (Marina/84, Ethan/87) 1114 E Ortega St, Santa Barbara 93103 (change) •••• Tim & Jenny GRIFFIN (Lindsey/86, Kaylee/95) 3690 Monroe St, Carlsbad 92008 (change) •••• Heidi & Dennis MORATA (Lee/85, Elizabeth/87, Lillian/89) 6201 Hesketh Dr, Bakersfield 93309 •••• Shirley MUELLER & Mark GALBRAITH (Angelika/88) 3862 Crescent Dr, Santa Barbara 93110 (change) **(H)**

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BC — Annette MacKAY (Lincoln/92, Grant/96) 212 W Windsor Rd, N Vancouver V7N 2N1 •••• Pam MARTIN & Neil SEEDHOUSE (Willow/88, Robin/91, Forrest/94) 2633 York Av, Vancouver V6K 1E6 **(H)**

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QB — Cindy & Rene PELLETIER (Mathieu/88, Jean Luc/92) 1845 Ave Hornet, C.P. 712, Alouette G0V 1A0

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CA — Humboldt Homeschoolers, PO Box 2125, Trinidad 95570; 707-677-3290

CO — Mesa Verde Homeschoolers, PO Box 134, Mancos 81328; 970-882-7802

(more on next pg.)

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Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS.

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Address Changes:

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OH — Ohio Home Educators Network (new tel no. only) Catherine 216-786-8001 or Barbara 330-274-0542

PA — Diversity United in Homeschooling, 233 Bluebell Av, Langhorne 19047; 215-741-9389

UT — Utah Home Educ Assoc, PO Box 570218, Sigurd 84657-0218; 801-535-1533 or 801-342-4027

Delete:

RI — Rhode Islanders for Constitutional Education

Helpful Teachers — Laura McKenzie, 255 Oak Grove Rd, Springville AL 35146-9666 (math K-12, special ed) ••• Patricia Roberts, 21102 Pleasant Park Rd, Conifer CO 80433; 303-697-8158

Helpful Lawyers — Patricia Roberts, see above

Helpful Psychologists — Pamela Funati, 270 26 St, Suite 208, Santa Monica CA 90402; 310-840-4537 (marriage, family, & child therapist)

These complete lists are published in GWS #109

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Book Reviews

Pint-Size Science by Linda Allison & Martha Weston #3252 $8.95 + $3.50 s/h

The authors of one of our best-selling science books, *Blood and Guts*, have come up with another winner. *Pint-Size Science* is aimed at parents who want to explore science ideas with young children in the natural course of living and doing things together. For instance, one chapter discusses all the science that can be learned from informal walks with children and the things they usually do on the way: observing and examining the bugs, collecting leaves and seeds, playing in puddles.

Anyone who thinks that valuable learning only occurs when an adult is doing formal classroom-style teaching, would benefit from seeing the various situations presented in this book where children and adults interact and learn in spontaneous but meaningful ways. Further, the children's activity is often turned into education-speak for adults. For instance, the authors show how the scientific skills of observing, predicting, testing, and measuring are all involved in playing with sand.

My only quibble with this wonderful book is that the authors often provide leading questions and advise you to "challenge" your child to invent answers, to "draw her into thinking out loud." I worry that some parents will take this advice in the spirit that many schoolteachers take it, and turn it into a duty to make sure a child's learning process is "on schedule" by turning every encounter with a child into a "teachable moment." The learning process belongs to the child, as these authors do state over and over. Certainly there are times when it is appropriate to "make our children think" but I think we must do this far less often and with far more respect for the learner than some people might think after reading this book. Fortunately, the authors of this book do recognize this, but this message may easily get buried in all the "teachable moments" they present to you, so let me end by quoting from a wonderful passage from the middle of the book:

"The best learning happens when kids are given plenty of room to test things out for themselves in a free-form, playful way. Many of the projects in this book are designed to take advantage of the fact that to little kids, the whole world is a science lab. You supply the materials, then step out of the way and let your child experiment and play.

"Does this mean get out and stay out? No. Often you can step in and offer a suggestion, or ask a question that will help your child solve a problem or send her off experimenting in a whole new way." — Pat Farenga

Klutz Book of Magnetic Magic, by Paul Doherty & John Cassidy. #3286 $11.95 + $3.50 s/h

This book is a perfect example of how play leads to learning, and vice-versa. Take the Banana Compass as an example. First we are shown how to use a pencil, thread, magnet, and a banana to make a compass. Next we are given an explanation of how the banana, and all compasses, work. The text is snappy, humorous, and to the point. Even better, as with most Klutz books, is the extra stuff you get with the book.

The book has a metal cover which doubles as a game board for playing Horseshoes and Tiddlywinks with magnets, and it comes with five one-inch "doughnut" magnets, five 1/4-inch "pill magnets" (the "doughnut holes," if you will) and a special coin for doing some magic tricks. The magic tricks work well and come with performance tips, but what our kids do most are the various activities the book presents, such as three ways of making a pill magnet orbit around a larger doughnut magnet, creating a "floating pencil," and literally pulling the iron pieces out of iron-fortified cereal.

Jammed with fascinating anecdotes and colorful cartoons illustrating the history and discovery of magnetism, how magnets work, and how magnets interact with electricity, the book is a fantastic blend of information, activities, and fun. – PF

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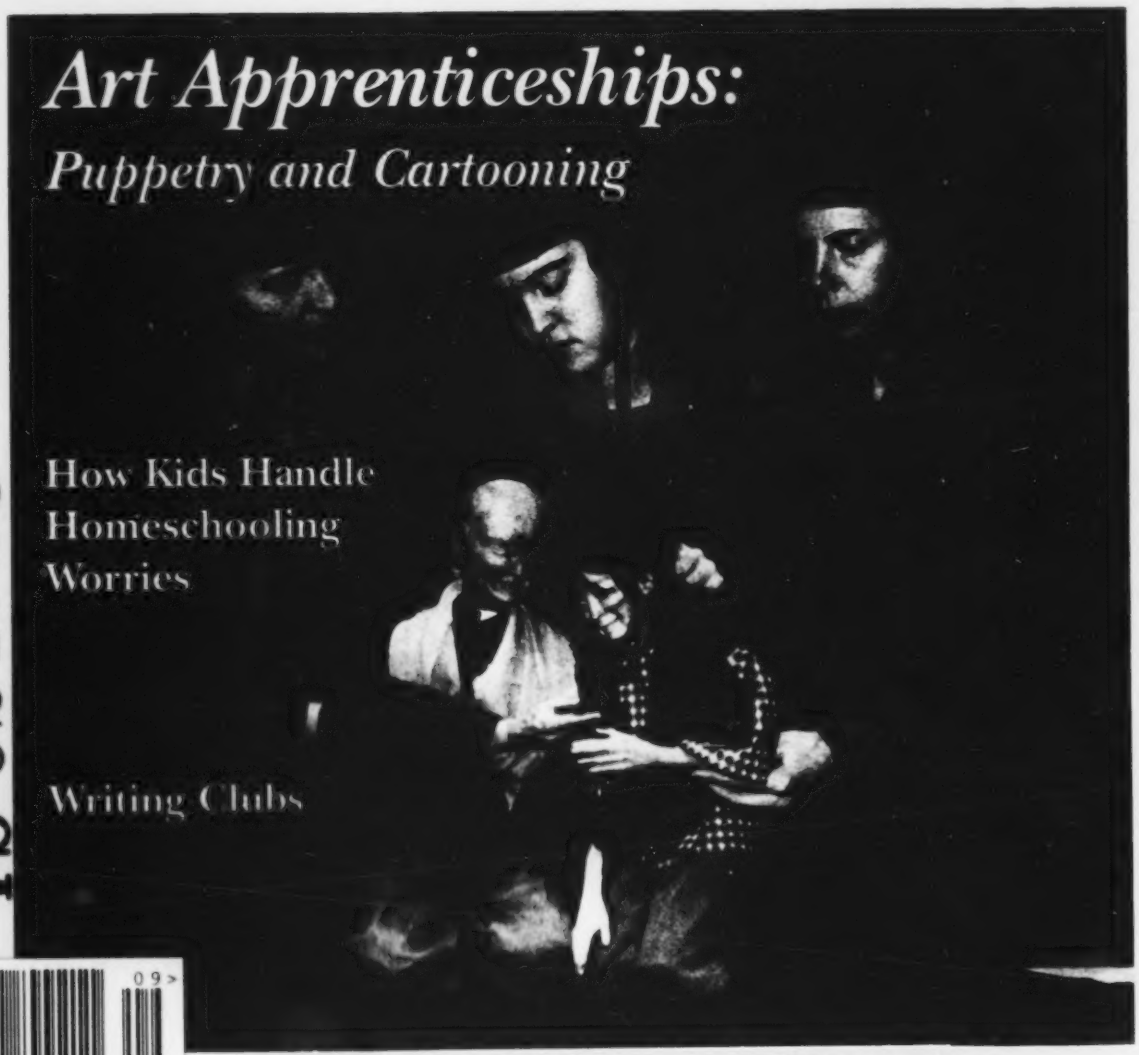
GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

Issue 112



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Homeschooling's Effect on Marriage
Working with School Board
Teen Gatherings

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Sept./Oct. '96

GWS

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In this issue

What would homeschooling be like if there were no skeptical inquiries from other people? Or if there were no school curriculum or timetable against which to measure what homeschoolers do?

These were the questions that kept entering my mind as I read the contributions for this issue's Focus. The subject is how young people handle homeschooling fears and worries – in other words, how they cope with those moments when something makes them wonder, "Am I really learning enough?"

Just as for parents, the question seldom arises independent of others' expectations. If no one ever asked homeschoolers, "What grade level are you working at?" or "What are you doing in science?", they would probably not experience doubt in that particular way. My guess is that they would still do a fair amount of evaluating of their lives and work, but it would be of a different sort. People who are pursuing their own goals do check with themselves periodically to ask, "Am I doing the things I want to be doing? Am I getting what I want to get out of this experience? Is this method of working, or this teacher, or this book, most useful to me?" But that's not the same as, "Am I learning enough according to society's standards?" or "according to a vague sense of what kids are learning in school?" (I say "vague" because too often, it's easy to confuse teaching with learning. When a school student says, "We're doing the periodic table in science class," that doesn't necessarily mean, "I, personally, am learning about and really understanding the periodic table." It just means, it's in the curriculum; it's being taught.)

Part of me strongly wishes that we did live in a world in which homeschoolers were free of the questions that make them compare themselves to others. On the other hand, when I was writing *A Sense of Self*, I began to see that continually having to reflect on one's way of learning and living, and having to decide whether to accept or reject external standards, led to a special kind of strength in the homeschooled girls I was interviewing. As I say in the book, "Simply being asked over and over again, 'Are you learning enough? Can you really learn that way?' propels homeschoolers into a kind of self-examination that can leave them vulnerable but can also give them a layer of strength and reinforcement that makes them both doubly secure and doubly self-aware."

Whatever else such questions do, they make homeschoolers *think* about their lives and their educations, and that's preferable to not thinking or reflecting at all. Unlike the school student who may only realize much later that he didn't get what he wanted out of his schooling, homeschoolers are continually evaluating their experience and figuring out how they should handle the expectations of others. They have to define for themselves what kind of learning they want to do and what "enough" will mean for them. Hard as this may be, I believe it's preferable to having someone else do the defining. — Susannah Sheffer

Unschooling in the News

[SS:] Newspaper and magazine articles about homeschooling appear so frequently that we can't mention all of them (we very much appreciate the readers around the country who send them to us, though). Here are excerpts from a couple of articles that are interesting both because they're in widely read publications and because they explicitly discuss unschooling:

From "Unschooling turns tradition on its head," from a recent issue of the Los Angeles Times *(we don't have the exact date because our copy is a reprint in a Massachusetts paper):*

Pat Willette believes that for her two young sons, Alexander and Nicholas Jones, living near a stream on 17 acres in Central Maine offers infinitely more learning opportunities than any classroom. ... Willette says that she smiles every time anyone asks her if she is going to give the children the summer off. "Since we don't give formal lessons and we don't devise formal learning experiences for them, there is nothing to give them the summer off from," she said. "Am I supposed to order my kids to stop reading, or order them to stop figuring out how much the toy they want to buy will cost?"

The Willette-Jones family is one of thousands across the country educating their children through real-life experiences, rather than in the classroom. ... Unschooling is an offshoot of the homeschool movement, which emphasizes flexibility and learning at a child's own pace outside school. But unlike traditional homeschooling, unschooling rejects the use of a formal textbook curriculum and relies instead on amplifying and encouraging a child's own interests. Its adherents have grown gradually in number throughout the two decades of a serious homeschool movement.

Next, the 6/12/96 issue of Education Week *ran a large ten-page spread on homeschooling, focusing on four families, including the Scandoras of Washington and the Hoyts of Maine, whom readers may recognize from GWS. Some interesting excerpts:*

Rhiannon Scandora, 13, works on an art project at her desk, squinting her eyes to focus on the tiny slits she makes with an X-Acto knife. She may stay with this intricate paper mosaic for 15 minutes, an hour, or two weeks. It is largely up to her. She may pick up the algebra textbook sitting under her desk and do a few math problems. Or maybe not. "People don't really seem to get it – that I don't really do 'school stuff,'" Rhiannon says. "It's hard to explain." The Scandoras are "unschoolers." Distinct from some other homeschoolers, unschoolers generally believe children learn best when left on their own. They think the best learning occurs when children want or need to learn something, not when they are forced. ...

... Zachary [Hoyt]'s passion is anything to do with aviation, architecture, and technology. Model rockets and airplanes he has built protrude from his closet and under his bed. Where Zachary's shelves are stacked with titles such as *Incredible Cross Sections* and airplane manuals, [his older sister] Joanna's offer *Les Miserables* and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. One of the few authors they agree to like is J.R.R. Tolkien, whose quotes on a poster grace one wall of Zachary's room. ...

They explain what they like about learning at home – managing their own schedules, working at their own pace, having bigger chunks of time to work on projects. Joanna adds that "it's also nice being able to question: to think out a refutation to something."

... The Collins family is part of a small but growing number of urban, black families gravitating toward homeschooling. ... As a linguist, one of Ron's major concerns for his children is language. He fears that in the local public schools – where many students come from homes where dialect or "black English" is spoken – his children might not acquire standard English skills or fully understand the contexts in which speaking in dialect is appropriate.

"I don't want them to think standard English is the only thing out there and that they should look down on those who speak dialect. I couldn't bear myself if I erased that dialect," Ron explains. "I want them to know both. But it's important in this society to play by the rules, and the language of success is standard American English. They're not going to get that in the public school here. The peer group games kick in – talking standard English is 'talking white,' and being smart isn't cool," he says, noting that some of his students at Coppin State still struggle with written and spoken standard English.

"We're not trying to segregate ourselves away from the real world," he continues. "We want our kids to have the skills to be able to make it out there. They need to be able to move in a number of circles."

[SS:] I have also had a chance to talk about self-directed learning on three different radio shows recently. I found the hosts of the shows on Mountain Lake (NY) Public Radio, New Hampshire Public Radio, and the "Subversive Parenting" show from Windsor, Ontario very receptive and interested.

A final news item – Pat Farenga attended the Olympic Trials in gymnastics, held here in Boston, and noticed in the biographical information that of 14 gymnasts, 5 were homeschoolers!

Working with School Board in Ontario

From Frederick Schueler (Ont.):

We have had an interesting experience in our county of working with the school board to write new homeschooling guidelines. To explain this, I have to give some background first: in Ontario, the Education Act

says that children must attend school between the ages of 6 and 16 unless they are receiving satisfactory instruction at home or elsewhere. Homeschoolers have always interpreted that to mean that if we are providing satisfactory instruction, our kids don't have to have anything to do with the school system, but some school boards, and some people in the Education Ministry, have interpreted it to mean that it's up to the school board to determine whether homeschoolers are providing satisfactory instruction. In some cases, boards have tried to require families to do a great deal of reporting, and they have sometimes gone on home visits.

Last spring, our school board announced that they were planning to revise their homeschooling policy. A couple of the families in our area went to talk to the school board members, and learned about their plans for revision of the guidelines. The board members said they wanted input from the homeschoolers, and the homeschoolers said that they didn't like the intrusive home visits. Unfortunately, the homeschoolers weren't asked to help write the new guidelines, and instead they received an even more intrusive policy.

These homeschoolers advised all the other homeschoolers in the area, who belonged to various different homeschooling groups, to boycott this new policy. Meanwhile, we decided to try to have more visibility within the community. We named our various homeschooling groups and started putting notices in the newspaper about what we were doing. When our daughter, Jenny, won a national contest for creating a biodiversity poster, we wrote a press release that the local paper printed which emphasized her homeschooling.

Jenny was interested in singing in a choir, and around here, people either sing in their school choir or their church choir, so there aren't any independent, secular choirs. My wife Aleta went to the school principal and was told that children who weren't registered in school couldn't participate in choir.

At about the same time, we got a letter from our school superintendent telling us about specific guidelines we were required to follow for homeschooling. They included registration forms and requests for written plans, course outlines, list of materials to be used and the system of assessment and recordkeeping that we planned to use. We wrote back a polite letter explaining why we were not going to follow these guidelines and pointing out that these guidelines had been drawn up without the promised consultation from parents. We also wrote up a detailed critique of the guidelines.

A couple of weeks later, we got a second letter from the superintenent which enclosed a new draft of the homeschool procedures. This draft mostly focused on what procedures the board was to follow if it determined that parents were not providing satisfactory instruction. At this point, we (and other homeschoolers) were invited to come to an educational policy meeting of the school board, to comment on the proposed revised guidelines. About fifty homeschoolers went there, and apparently this was a very unusual response; we were told that the board is usually concerned about the lack of interest that parents show in their activities.

The homeschoolers submitted written statements or read aloud what they had written, and to our surprise, the committee members didn't defend their draft of the guidelines, but instead passed a motion that homeschoolers should be invited to meetings of the policy committee in the future, to draw up a new policy together. They said we should select four delegates from among the homeschoolers, so we did that, choosing people from various homeschooling groups. There has been one meeting, which went very well, and the next one will be in September.

I had suggested that it would be a good idea if every family drew up the policy that they would like to see, so we're working on that over the summer. Our basic proposal is going to say that we think it's reasonable for homeschooling parents just to sign a waiver that relieves the school board of having to make the determination about whether satisfactory instruction is being provided. If we just indicated that our children were receiving satisfactory instruction, we would be in compliance with the Education Act and the school board would be relieved of the responsibility.

We would also like for our children to have the right to participate in school activities, so that will be something else we'll try to deal with. It's ironic that a couple of years ago, when our daughter Jenny was in grade 3, a local teacher, who met her and knew she was a homeschooler, invited her to be part of her class part time. That would have been fine with us, and the principal said it was fine, too, but the school board said no. So perhaps if these new guidelines are approved, Jenny and other homeschoolers will have the opportunity to participate in school activities when they choose to.

We will keep GWS readers posted on how things develop.

Office News

[SS:] Maureen Carey, who has opened and processed our mail and organized our book evaluating committee for four years, has left that job but will remain closely connected to Holt Associates by serving on our board of directors, leading seminars, and helping with future projects. Many of you know Maureen as the person who answered the phone when you called here and who gave you wonderful advice (or convinced you to subscribe to GWS!). We will miss having her in the office but are glad that she will remain part of our work.

We welcome Kim Webb to the mail clerk job. Kim is the coach at the studio where Pat and Day Farenga's daughters take gymnastics, and she says that she is excited about working for Holt Associates and is happy that she can bring her 3-year-old daughter Alyson with her when she needs to.

We want to extend a big round of thanks to all the organizers of the conferences we've spoken at this spring – Barbara David in California, Jane Boswell in Massachusetts, Manfred Smith in Maryland, Nancy Plent in New Jersey, and Deb Shell in Vermont. These folks, and all the others who worked with them, put in long hours to create wonderful events. We also thank the parents and young people who helped staff our book tables at these events and those who are able to represent us

and staff tables at conferences we can't attend ourselves. And not least of all, thanks to all of you who come to our talks and visit our tables. Conferences are hectic and we seldom have a chance for lengthy con-versation with anyone, but we enjoy meeting so many of you and we appre-ciate the warm welcome you give us.

As we go to press, we're making plans for our own seminars, to be held in August, September, and throughout the year. We've found a great space that we can use for these events. If you're not already on our mailing list, call to ask for our seminar brochure.

You'll notice that we've made a slight change in the dates that appear on the cover of GWS. Previously, our issues have been dated with the even-numbered month first – for example, GWS #111 was the June/July issue. That reflects the fact that the issues are published in even-numbered months and subscribers receive them then. But we've realized that our distributors, and some subscribers too, get confused because they're accustomed to magazines arriving in advance of the date on the cover. They expect an issue dated Aug./Sept. to arrive in late July. Some distributors have had trouble placing GWS because of this, so from now on we will date the issues with the odd-numbered month that follows the month in which you receive the magazine. This issue in your hands, which is mailed in mid-August, is called the Sept./Oct. issue.

Please note that this is the only thing that is changing. Issues will still be published and mailed according to our usual schedule. On your mailing label, the date above your name is still an even-numbered date – it's the month in which you will receive your last issue. If we decide to change the way the label reads, we'll be sure to let you know.

Calendar

Aug. 24-27: California Home= Education conference in **Sacramento, CA.** Pat & Day Farenga speaking; materials available. For info: Barbara David, 916-391-4942.

Aug. 24-25: Ozark Co-operative Warehouse conference in **Fayetteville, AR**. Susannah Sheffer speaking about homeschooling; books available. For info: Lee Sexton, 501-521-4920.

Aug. 30-Sept. 1: Rethinking Education weekend conference retreat in **Westlake, TX.** Workshops on various aspects of self-directed learning, childhood, parenting, and community life. For children and teens, too. For info: Barb Lundgren, 817-540-6423 or Sarah Jordan, 817-430-4835.

Sept. 7: Rocky Mountain Education Connection Not Back to School Picnic at Washington Park, **Denver, CO**. For info: 303-449-5916 or email Valerie_Berg@nile.com.

Nov. 2-4: Wondertree Education Society's 4th annual homelearners conference in **Vancouver**, BC. Speakers, workshops, discussions. For info: Wondertree, Box 38083, Vancouver BC V5Z 4L9; 604-739-5943.

Deadline for GWS #113 listings (events in November or later) is 9/10. Deadline for GWS #114 (events in January or later) is 11/10. ◆

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Art Apprenticeships

Working with Puppeteers

Zoë Blowen-Ledoux (ME) writes:

For the past year, I have been doing a puppetry apprenticeship at the Figures of Speech Theater. My introduction to Figures of Speech Theater came two years ago (when I was 14) when my father contacted the company to see if I could shadow (follow around) Co-Director John Farrell for a day at the Children's Museum of Maine. John was in the middle of a four-week residency in which he was carving puppet heads on the museum exhibition floor and performing for school groups in the museum's theater. John said I could watch him, and that day I got an overview of the work he does to form a puppet head, and I saw him perform. At the time, I was just becoming involved with another theater, and although I liked John, I wasn't much interested in the work he did. Oddly, this feeling has now totally turned around, and now I'm more likely to be enthusiastic about something that has puppets than something with actors.

Ten months after that day with John, I was asked to audition for Figures of Speech's winter show. I received a role, and in this first intensive puppetry experience, I manipulated the Great Mystery Puppet, Isis, a character without dialogue who was ever-present on stage. This role was simple, and after I learned and understood the basic manipulation, I became tired of it. Although my first puppetry experience became quite mundane, it nevertheless made me realize that I wanted to have a more complex role. After this show, we began talking about the possibility of my apprenticing with the company. I was thrilled by the idea of being able to have organized time to learn from the Farrells.

In March, I accompanied Figures of Speech on a four-week tour to the Smithsonian. Getting to know the Farrells better, and seeing their work, enhanced my interest in puppetry as an art form and my willingness to commit a year of study to it. Now, after a year of being around Carol and John, I'm beginning to understand more about what attracted me: the symbolism and ritualism of which puppets are capable. I've been learning about the Farrells' theories about puppetry, and I find that I accept and identify with them. I'm learning that, for me, puppets reflect some part of us that's not visible without some symbol to illustrate and illuminate it.

Something else that appeals to me is how each puppeteer has his or her own interpretation of what a puppet is and how it relates to the world. I got to see this in action at the Puppeteers of America festival last July. Talking with different master puppeteers has given me reference and a beginning understanding of the different styles and theories that are behind puppetry. I found it so interesting to see the broad range of style the label "puppetry" covers.

The intensive training part of my apprenticeship began in September as I worked with John on wood carving. I began by reading through many books with photos of different puppets to get ideas of what style of puppet I wanted to carve. I spent four weeks making a clay head, a model of the one I was going to make in wood, and learning to sharpen carving tools. In October I went to a carving workshop that John was teaching at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, Maine. That weekend was the first time I'd done anything with wood, and I found I really loved it. After working on my own, I enjoyed the chance to work around other people, but I found that I wasn't working as fast as the others. Unlike the other participants, I didn't feel a strong push to finish during the weekend, because I knew that I'd have plenty of time after the workshop to finish my puppet head. I realized that it was more important for me to meet and get to know people that weekend. I decided that I needed to take advantage of being in such a stimulating place with so many creative people while I could.

In the month after Haystack, I continued carving. I loved seeing the figure and the personality emerge from the wood. I completed carving the head and set it aside in order to move on to pattern drafting. This shifted my time from being with John to being with Carol. I learned to sew on the machine and did many sewing exercises to make straighter, faster seams and have better control. I took on a project of drafting a set of clothing that I will be able to wear.

I've also been reading collections of myths and stories and the book *The Power of Myth*, by Joseph Campbell. I began this reading to find a story I could adapt into a character sketch for my puppet, but I've found myself really intrigued by mythology from all the different regions of the world. This has led me to the idea of writing my own myth, by incorporating aspects from different cultures, rather than choosing only one to use.

Overall, my apprenticeship has been a great chance to do focused reading. I've read many articles in theater and puppetry magazines, and lately John and Carol and I have had discussions about articles and theories. I enjoy talking and thinking with them about the ideas that the articles pose, and I find that I absorb much more this way than if I just read them myself.

Although this reading is ongoing, the drafting and carving are falling into the background as we get involved with the larger process of creating Figures of Speech's new show. It's exciting for me to take part in the huge effort of opening a show. I can see the skills I learned last fall now coming into play. Yet as exciting as it is, the beginning stages of brainstorming and writing this show were quite

frustrating for me. I found that in the meetings with John and Carol, though my contribution was welcome, I wasn't able to contribute at the level on which the Farrells were working. I think there were two reasons for this: my inexperience in the process and my not fully understanding how it worked, and my insecurity about sharing the ideas I did come up with because I didn't have the experience to judge whether they were at all appropriate. This issue hasn't come up for me since then, as we have moved onto different stages of the show's growth.

Overall, very few problems have come up in my apprenticeship. Those that have come up, we have managed to solve in a creative way. For example, earlier this winter I was frustrated with the way the schedule was set up and how short the periods of time were in which I could work. We adapted the schedule to allow me to stay at the Farrells' home for longer, more intense blocks of time.

At times, I've felt frustrated by how long it takes me to complete something I'm working on. When carving last fall, it seemed that I was taking too long to finish. Thinking about it now, I can see that in fact I was absorbing a lot, both of the more obvious quantifiable skills (like carving and tool sharpening) and also of the less obvious adjustments I was making to fit into the Farrells' lifestyle.

I've been challenged creatively in many ways throughout this year as I developed new skills and ideas. My training here pushes my boundaries of familiarity and presents many new possibilities to pursue.

Cartooning Mentor

Susan Shilcock (PA) writes:

Three years ago, when Nicholas was 9, he asked if he could learn about cartooning. I knew that a cartooning class was offered at the local art center, but I didn't think a large group situation would work best for him at that time. I was able to track down the class's teacher, however, and I asked him if he would be interested in experimenting with a tutorial with two homeschoolers (Nicholas's friend Christopher was interested in cartooning, too). Mark was interested and available, so we set up a four-week series. It worked so well that Nicholas and Mark continued meeting weekly, and now Nicholas is almost 12 and the two of them are still meeting and learning from one another.

Nicholas and his cartooning mentor, Mark Gruener, drawing side by side

Before the first lesson, we had discussed our goals (parents' and children's) with Mark, so he came with some preliminary activities to offer, but he was very open to Nicholas and Christopher's own preferences. This has been one of Mark's great strengths as a mentor. He is wonderful at listening to Nicholas's wishes and building on where Nicholas is in his own work. ("You said you wanted to work on improving the drawing of muscles in the leg," Mark might say, "so let's focus on that today.") He also does his own work during their lessons, and he talks as he draws, explaining what he is seeing or why he is shading a particular area. He uses accurate and technical language ("foreshortening," "perspective"), and even if Nicholas didn't understand the words initially, he grew into understanding after hearing the words used in context. Mark prefers to have students work side by side with him, rather than across the table, because this gives them the same perspective on each other's work and probably also provides a sense of camaraderie and equality.

The meetings take place in our house, so as I'm walking through the room I can hear that Mark and Nicholas intersperse their work with lots of conversations about drawings they've done previously, action figures they've purchased, their preferences for certain comic artists, etc. It is a very relaxed and friendly atmosphere and the teaching moments occur quietly and in perfect context. Mark might say, "I want this right leg to appear as if it's coming toward me, so I'm darkening other parts of the body and lightening the leg."

Another strength of Mark's mentoring is that when he comments on Nicholas's work, he describes rather than evaluates it. Descriptions guide and give information for future drawings, whereas evaluations (like "That's beautiful") focus the learner on pleasing the teacher.

We have made it clear to Mark that we don't hold him accountable for a specific amount of progress by a specific time. Because we know Mark is offering lots of helpful information and positive modeling, we trust Nicholas to make use of the experience and to grow in his art proficiency on his own timetable. Because the main "requirement" of the lesson is for two motivated and enthusiastic learners to discuss, experiment, and share their progress, we know the time spent will be successful.

Nicholas's sessions with Mark are not his only drawing times during the week. He finds reasons to draw every day. The weekly lesson gives him new food for thought, but the hours he spends drawing on his own are equally instructive to him. He reads about artists, experiments with new techniques, and eagerly shares his drawings and thinking with any family member ready to listen. He has begun to create his own story boards and mini comics, developing characters

Suggestions for Finding a Good Mentor

Based on her years of experience helping Nicholas and his three older sisters find mentors, Susan offers these suggestions:

We almost always start new experiences as experiments. That helps us define more clearly what we want and what parts of the current arrangement are on target. At times, a short series (four or eight sessions) may prove enough for the child at that time. At other times, four sessions is enough to let us know that the content is appealing but we need to see if we can refine the mentor's style or find an adult more in sync with our child. Though many of our short-term experiments have ended up lasting much longer, proposing the idea as short-term makes it easier for the adult to say yes.

Over the years we have come to realize that there are two major criteria (for us) that make for a successful mentoring experience, and both are equally important. The first is that the mentors have expertise in a certain field and that they truly love what they do. The second criterion is that the person be capable of working successfully with children – they must be kind, patient, sensitive, and empathetic to the different ways that people process information. It has been difficult for us to find people who meet both criteria, and I want to emphasize that although our children have had several wonderful mentors, it has sometimes taken quite a while to find them, and we have had to make many calls before we found the right match. There is often a considerable lag time between when the child first expresses an interest in finding a particular mentor and when the actual connection is made, and if we had given up when the first lead didn't come through, we wouldn't have had so many successful mentor relationships.

Two clues have helped us to identify people who demonstrate both of the criteria we think are important. First, we look for people actively involved in their area of interest. We look for an artist, not an art teacher, a Spanish-speaking person, not a Spanish teacher, a wood worker, not a shop teacher, a chemist, not a chemistry teacher. (Of course, sometimes these are one and the same.) Second, we look for people who see themselves as learners. Generally, if someone believes that he has a complete body of knowledge, he tends to be less enthusiastic and more rigid about how he shares his information. On the other hand, people who view themselves as just further along the spectrum of learning about their subject will share not only their expertise but also their own challenges and confusions. Such a mentor is willing to walk along side by side with a child, and such a mentor remembers every day what it is like to question and discover, to be confused and find solutions, and to add to their own learning bit by bit.

Having mentors believe that they are not responsible for a student's progress is another continuous challenge we have to face. Traditionally, teachers are expected to prove that their students have learned a specific set of skills by a specific time. Especially when mentors are used to working with children in school, we continually have to let them know that we don't hold them accountable for teaching our children certain skills by a certain time. We know that in that situation, testing, grades, and other external rewards become the motivators, and students (and teachers) sometimes forget the genuine joy or interest they have. But when the external constraints and motivators are removed, internal motivation can blossom.

and plot lines. He also delights in sketching while on nature walks, making quick gestures (10-second drawings) of animals and drawing one creature in many positions. He has commented, "I love to draw. It's a challenge, it's fun, and I find it relaxing." Mark has used the same words when describing his sessions with Nicholas: "This is fun for me. I come here and relax." What an emotionally comfortable atmosphere for real learning to take place!

Nicholas Bergson-Shilcock adds:

Mark has helped me to draw things as they really are and not what I assume them to be. He has helped me to see things. I used to look at a picture and I'd see an action hero and I'd start drawing what I thought I saw. But now I see that figure in geometric shapes. By working with Mark, I've improved in drawing muscles, in shading, and in drawing in 3-D.

Mark offers ideas for improving my work by saying things like, "Try to use the edge of your pencil more" or "I liked how you drew that arm in 3-D. I like how you sculpted that nose. It looks more realistic with the bumps and holes. I see how you shaded that area to make it darker so it looks further away."

He usually is doing the same drawing as I am so he can show me how to change and add but without drawing on my work. He doesn't think there is one right way to draw and he thinks each person has their own personality. For example, if I am trying to draw a picture from a comic book, he'll say, "Don't expect your picture to look like that. It will be a similar picture, but in your own style."

Another thing I like is that Mark taught himself to draw on his own, and he's still learning. And since we're working one-on-one, he can focus on my goals and I can choose what I want to work on each week. I have more freedom than if I were in a big class. I tell Mark what I want to do next week, and he gets me the supplies I'll need. Sometimes he makes a suggestion about what I can do, but I always know that I can say yes or no, and he always gives me more than one suggestion. ◆

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Gatherings of Teenage Homeschoolers

All around the country, teenagers are taking the initiative to organize their own gatherings for support, inspiration, and fun. If these stories lead to any more gatherings, let us know!

A Weekend at the Nature Conservancy

Selina Hunt (NY) writes:

I had the idea of an unschooling teen overnight in The Manor House for quite some time. The Manor House is a huge Victorian mansion in the middle of The Nature Conservancy's Mashomack Preserve on Shelter Island, where I live. I phoned for information about spending a night there, and received a packet with rules and information about using the house. Then in late January, at a teen get-together in Freeport, NY, I brought up the idea of an unschoolers' overnight and the teens there were all interested. We decided it would be easier on people traveling long distance if we made it a weekend, plus it would be more fun that way.

My friend Emily Houk (also an unschooling teen) came to spend a few days at my house, and during that time we phoned the Preserve to see if the dates we had talked about with the other teens worked with the Preserve's schedule. They did, and they penciled us in for the weekend of April 12th. It was so exciting that this was finally going to happen!

In order to use The Manor House, we had to submit a mission statement and group description, as well as a proposed schedule of our weekend. It was then that Emily and I formed the Self Learners Teen Network and began to plan the weekend.

Also, if thirty percent of the group were Shelter Island residents, there would be a substantial discount. We were worried at first that we wouldn't be able to meet that percentage, but we got our group of Shelter Islanders together first and then determined what the size of the entire group would be: 33 people. A few days later we received our letter saying that the Program Coordinator ran our request by the board and it was approved.

Emily and I designed a brochure with a drawing of the Manor House, a bit about the Preserve, a map of Long Island with directions from Connecticut and New York City, a list of what to bring, and, at the bottom, a form asking for basic information about each person registering and the signature of a parent or guardian on a release form so we could go kayaking and canoeing.

We sent out fifty brochures to people ages 13 and up, using names from the Connecticut Unschoolers' Network, the New York City Home Educators' Alliance, Long Islanders Growing at Home Together, and the Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education. We had friends we knew would come to the weekend but we were hoping to meet new people as well. At first we were worried about not having enough people, but by the time our deadline came around, we were worried about having to turn people away. It was very exciting when envelopes addressed to SLTW began showing up in my post office box! We even had to establish a waiting list, once we had our full group, in case someone should cancel.

On the form, we asked, "Are your parents interested in chaperoning?" We needed adult chaperones because the Manor House required that we have one adult for every ten teenagers, but I also wanted to have adults there in case we had any problems. It made me more comfortable, especially since there would be people there that I didn't know. We ended up having about seven adults there, including my grandparents (because they live nearby). Sometimes they joined in what we were doing, but sometimes they sat and read because they wanted to give us some privacy, too. The teenagers mixed with everyone,

The teens (and their adults) at the Shelter Island weekend gathering.

though – not only did the older teens mix with the younger ones, but they all talked to the chaperones, too, and that was nice.

We tried to make the weekend as inexpensive as possible and it ended up costing $40 per person with all meals and activities included. We had no problem figuring out a vegetarian menu for the weekend, but buying ingredients times thirty was a little more difficult. Emily, my family, and I prepared a couple of meals ahead of time, but everyone helped cook the rest in the Manor's commercial kitchen. Since there were five meals, we created five groups and rotated them for each meal. That way, someone would be cooking for dinner, setting the table for breakfast, serving for lunch, clearing the table after the next dinner, and loading the dishwasher after brunch.

People began to arrive on Friday afternoon. They explored and settled into the house and we played games until the full group was there. Then we began our first group meal which was followed by a presentation by the Program Coordinator of the Preserve. She showed some slides and talked about Mashomack in particular and the Nature Conservancy's role in general. We spent the rest of the evening talking and getting to know one another. During the weekend there seemed to be constant music. Some of us brought our own instruments, and the house had a piano which was always being played.

The next morning after breakfast we had a group discussion because the night before there had been a "lights out" time which didn't really work. Some people did want to sleep at that time but others wanted to stay up. We decided that the next night, after "lights out" time it would be quiet upstairs for people who wanted to sleep but downstairs you could stay up as late as you wanted.

The kayaking and canoeing that had been planned had to be canceled, much to everyone's disappointment, because the water temperature was too cold. Instead we took a walk along the beach and back to the house through the woods. We had to hurry in one spot so as not to disturb an osprey on her nest.

On the proposed schedule, we had put two hours of group volunteering, which we were going to spend cleaning garbage and recyclables out of the salt water marsh areas. The Program Coordinator came and handed out trash bags and gloves and split our group into three smaller groups and headed each of us in different directions. It was fun doing the clean-up, and we found all kinds of neat things along the way, including a set of matching antlers sticking out of the sand.

Later on that day, after dinner, I came back to my room and there was quite a crowd. One of the teens had brought her bass guitar and amplifier and was playing. Some people had fallen asleep and others were just sitting and listening. I joined them and soon the entire group was crowded into our room. We must have sat there in complete silence, except for the bass playing, for about half an hour, and she was still playing when some of us went downstairs for ice cream. It was really neat.

Once it was dark we took a nighttime hike. We only used our flashlights and when we came to an intersection in the trail and wanted to make sure we went the right way. That was a lot of fun. The next day an early morning bird walk had been planned, but everyone slept through it. We just barely got up in enough time to prepare our waffle brunch. Just before it was time to leave, we all gathered around the huge dining room table and had a closing circle. We went around and everyone mentioned a highlight of the weekend for them. A lot of people mentioned the marsh clean-up, as well as the nighttime hike and the bass playing. We talked about doing another weekend next year, and someone said, "Why not in the Fall?" Since there were people there from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York City, and Upstate New York, we asked people to look around for a place in their area to have the next weekend. It was sad when people started to leave – the weekend went by so fast but was a lot of fun, and it *has* to happen again!

The weekend definitely lived up to my expectations. My main reasons for wanting to do it had been to meet other teenage unschoolers and to share such a beautiful place with others who might not have a place like that near them. I did get to meet new people, and several of my friends have told me that they are keeping in touch with new people they met during the weekend. It makes me really happy to know that not only did I meet new people myself, but I created an opportunity for others to do so as well.

We didn't actually talk that much about unschooling during the weekend; I think that since we knew we had it in common, we didn't have to talk about it. There was quite a range in how long people had been out of school – some had been out for many years, some for only one year, and some for only a month! Occasionally some of the newer unschoolers would ask us about how we went about unschooling, but I think also that a lot of what they learned from us they learned just from watching how we did things and how we related to each other, and from the experience of the weekend itself.

Spreading the Word

From Corinna Marshall of Maine:

I had the idea of getting together with other teenage unschoolers in Maine for a while. I got to know Zoë Blowen-Ledoux through her newsletter, *Self-Schoolers Network News*, and when we started corresponding, I told her my idea. We were really excited about it and wrote back and forth for a long time. We kept coming up for new ideas about what we would do. We were imagining something ongoing – a way for teenagers to form connec-

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tions and meet every so often. It would be a way for us to share resources, because a lot of people don't know how many options are open to them, and we thought that if we all talked to each other about what we were doing with our lives, each of us could make our own lives more exciting as we learned about our opportunities.

Another goal we had was to spread the word about unschooling, because it's a very misunderstood concept.

Zoë and I live about two hours from each other, so at first we didn't see each other very often. But then we started getting together more, and during this time, a mutual friend, Damon Holman, became an unschooler and started talking about our ideas with us. Suddenly the whole thing began to feel more concrete, and we decided to start with a weekend gathering where we would get together with as many others as possible and figure out what our group would do. At that time, we thought we would have workshops during the weekend, where people could share their skills and experiences. We also wanted to have lots of discussions about social issues, because one of our ideas was that the group could do various kinds of activism together.

We decided to have the weekend gathering at my house, and we divided up the planning jobs. We mailed an announcement to people on Zoë's newsletter's mailing list, and we also went through the GWS Directory and looked for families in the area with teenagers.

About ten people came to the gathering, although the numbers fluctuated because some people left after the first night, for various reasons, and others came later on. We ended up just hanging out and talking a lot, rather than having organized workshops, but a lot of good stuff happened from that time. One big thing was that Damon's aunt, who works for Maine public radio, came and recorded us for the radio. She asked us questions and we talked about our experiences. That was one of the biggest highlights of the weekend, for me.

Another highlight was the great discussion we had one night, when we went around and each talked about ideas for what the group should do next. One idea was to have some kind of presence at a big fair Maine has every year called the Common Ground Fair. We thought of having a table or a demonstration of some sort.

It was interesting for me to notice some of the differences between people like me, who have been in school for most of their lives and have only recently started unschooling, and people who have been unschooling their whole lives. I have the feeling that I have to find all the people that I know who hate school and let them know that unschooling is an option for them. I'm really interested in the movement aspect of unschooling, in how it's treated in society, and one of my goals is to get as many people out of school as possible – if that's what they want, of course, if it works for them. It was so much by chance that I found out about unschooling that I have a vision of our group being a really organized presence in this area, so that we can give support to people who are interested in unschooling and need help figuring out what it is.

When we talked about this in the group, I found that people who have been unschooling all their lives may have less of a need to spread the word in this way, less of a need to make school kids aware of their options. Maybe that's because those of us who have been in school can identify with school students more; I don't know. Whereas we have a kind of fire about it and are going around saying, "Listen, freedom is great!", people who have been unschooling all their lives just think that freedom is normal. But all of us are enthusiastic about trying to challenge the misconceptions about unschooling.

It was exciting, during our weekend, just to meet people with whom we all had something in common and to become friends with one another. Although we didn't have the organized workshops, that might happen at another gathering, or we might achieve some of the same goals, like learning new skills, incidentally, by being friends with each other. We have some tentative plans for future get-togethers, and we're thinking of staying in touch through letters. One person will start the letter, send it to the next person, and that person will add something and then send it on, until eventually everyone will have seen it.

The other thing that was amazing about the weekend, for me, was just that it was actually happening. Zoë said, too, that she's had a lot of plans that just kind of fizzle out. I think that as young people, we're not used to being taken seriously by others, so we're not used to taking our own ideas seriously either and really following through and making them happen. So it was exciting just to realize that we had planned this event and made it happen. ◆

Making plans and sharing ideas in Maine

Challenges & Concerns

Mothers Need Time

Lorraine Hoyt (ME) writes:

I enjoyed the Focus in GWS #111 on alone-time and had a few thoughts in response. I've heard several mothers at recent meetings of our local support group talk about feeling stretched and overwhelmed and exhausted trying to balance the needs of older and quite young children. Sometimes they feel that sending the older ones back to school is the only way to solve their problem of lack of time for themselves and lack of time to "teach."

I've always seen not going to school as a way to preserve time for the children to do what matters to them, and I've felt less that I was a teacher and more that I was guardian of some space or time in which they could learn and grow. And I don't think mothers who stay at home with their children should feel that, having made that choice, they must then spend every moment meeting the needs of children. I also must meet my own needs – that is also my work. By leaving the children alone sometimes while I take time to read or write or go for a walk or play music or lie in the hammock and look at the sky, I allow them opportunities to pursue their own goals independently. Perhaps they will also be parents some day and I want them to know it is acceptable and essential to take time for themselves.

At our house every day when we are at home without visitors we have an hour of quiet time after lunch. It grew out of naps the children took when younger. Now they can be where they want and do what they like so long as it does not intrude on anyone else. I don't recall that anyone ever complained about it, perhaps because it is followed by an hour spent together playing games, walking, reading aloud, cooking, or whatever. During that time I am very focused on the children. I think knowing they will have my undivided attention at certain times makes it easier for them to work and play alone at others.

I've just been reading *A Life Worth Living* and wrote down what John Holt says about children in simpler societies getting more helpful as they get older while in ours they get less so. It seems to me that children who are constantly supervised, instructed, amused, herded, have no time to develop their own abilities and interests constructively. But in our lives, empty spaces are vital. The way I explain what we do is not that we "homeschool" but that we don't go to school and thus create a space. People so often tell me with great enthusiasm of some program or class or experience that would be wonderful for my children because they are so eager to learn. But if we did all these things, there would be no more time in a day, and I wonder what we would give up in order to fit in this new and wonderful thing. John Holt also talks about that in the letters, about needing time to digest what we take in. Perhaps that is what the spaces are for. The question I am always asking is, "How much is enough?" The general assumption seems to be that more is always better, as much as one can get, but I think the question needs pondering.

Sherry Boas (FL) writes:

There was a time, in the not-too-distant past, when I used to play a lot. My days were not then too full of work, worries, and woes to prevent me from taking a break and putting aside the "I-must-do's" and accept pleasure – to play. I remember that time well, so I know that it was either not that long ago or so wonderful that the memories have lingered longer than usual. I'm ready to go back there again.

I just snapped at my daughter when she asked me in a totally caring voice (which I unthinkingly interpreted as an accusing remark), "Are you tired, Mama?" Yes! I am tired, and especially, I now realize, tired of taking my weariness out on the people I love the most. There was no excuse for my curt retort or sulky, morose demeanor. What lessons do I teach with such behavior?

I need to play more. Were I to put aside work and take a break and do something fun alone or with others, I – we all – would be so much happier. The work would still get done, perhaps better, because I would feel less resentful of the time it takes me away from fun.

How to play? Well, there are so many choices! To juggle or garden or take a row in the lake, to take a walk or read a book (alone or to the kids), to draw, paint, cook something special, play Scrabble, or do word puzzles. The choices are plentiful. That's not the problem. The problem is allowing myself to feel good. I must remind myself: I deserve to have fun.

Since my kids were very young, I've taught them to set goals, to make goals real and to attain them slowly by rewarding themselves along the way. My children understand, perhaps better than I do, the wisdom of my own words. It is time for me to listen to myself and begin rewarding my work well done by taking breaks along the way.

I see this as being an ongoing problem in a homeschooling, home business and/or homesteading family. There are always more things to do than there seems to be time in which to do them. Also, in such a family, time is not structured by others (schools, office hours, etc.) but must be internally set, and that is not an easy thing to do. The result is often strife and struggle and, at least for me, the result is that I put aside the pursuits I (foolishly) deem less important in favor of the somehow more noble, work-oriented tasks.

How to change it? The first step is always to acknowledge the problem. That done, I can follow up with a resolve reinforced by actual visual reminders – short sentences placed on cards in my car, on my desk, in the kitchen, saying "Accept pleasure!" or "Embrace fun!" The visuals make the goals real and immediate and make them more likely to happen.

After that it usually all falls into

place, at least for a while – but hey, who's complaining? A little while is all right with me. Any small step toward a more playful, joyful, childlike existence is simply fine. And maybe, after enough "little whiles," I just might learn to make a great big change and get rid of this bad attitude toward play once and for all.

Homeschooling's Effect on Marriage

These writers are responding to Patricia Schuyer Norton's letter in GWS #110: From Jane Jackson of Vermont:

As a very happily married woman with two homeschooled children, a garden, sheep, and cattle, I would like to assure you that, like many challenges, homeschooling is worth the effort. I look at homeschooling as a natural extension of parenting, which ideally is a natural extension of a good marriage. Your statement that your husband is "extremely helpful and supportive and patient," combined with your entire letter showing your concern for your marriage, displays the effort that is there, and that stands for a lot.

I can remember that when my daughter was an infant, a neighbor told me that, now that her younger daughter was 4, she (the mother) was no longer exhausted all the time. It seemed a lifetime away to me, but now that *my* daughter's younger brother is 5 1/2, I agree that when the youngest is 4, something *lifts*. I'm far from bursting with energy, but I was amazed to find myself reading a novel when my son was 4. I hadn't made it through anything longer than a magazine article in eight years! Also, in our family, the older the kids got, the faster they got, which meant they could keep up with Dad and spend time with him (when he was home), relieving me of the previously unrelenting demands of just "being available." As kids get older, they are able to spend time alone: reading, playing outside, or building train tracks in their room, and you do get time to refuel in whatever ways you choose.

In order to maintain my sense of *me*, I have had to adjust the things I

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used to do to fuel myself, in order to fit my current life. I've been very fortunate to be able to do that in a way that makes sense. For example, before marriage, I was very involved with horses. I would love to be involved still, but time and facilities are not available. So I fulfill my interest in animal management with our sheep. I fulfill my love of working with "trainable animals," if you will, by having Border Collies, which are equally rewarding, take much less time, are much easier to house and transport, and have become an irreplaceable asset to our farm (they aren't pets!). It all fits. If I were single with no kids and had the choice of Border Collies or horses, I'd take horses in a flash. But I'm not that person anymore, so I adapted.

I get time away from home and family for an occasional dog clinic or trial, and the concentration required forces me to genuinely forget about children, dishes, garden, and other responsibilities. They're all still there when I re-turn, but I've had a break. It's a break which benefits me (I get a change), benefits the family (Dad spends time alone with the kids), and benefits the farm (it improves our working dogs).

Likewise, our farm provides plenty of opportunity for our growth as a couple. This is our shared project. As tired as we both are (my husband works 40 hours a week off the farm), we go together each night for a check of all the animals before we go to bed. The kids are in bed by then so we have uninterrupted conversation; sometimes it is about the kids, but a lot of the time it is about goals, plans, hopes, and fears. Some nights it's only a few minutes, other times it's much longer, but it's a way we keep connected.

I do find a fine line between being the mother I want to be (available and involved, not relying on someone else for childcare) and the person I want to be (a partner on this farm who refuses to slip into being simply cook and bottlewasher). To do this, both my roles must mesh. Our quality time with the kids isn't taking them to parks or out for a special meal. It can be in the garden or in the barn. They help, they learn, and they are involved.

I don't think my husband is a person who needs my undivided attention in order for us to have a wonderful marriage. As long as we communicate and work together, we don't seem to need "intensity and focus" just for each other. After all, my husband is extremely helpful and supportive and patient, too.

From Julie Scandora (WA):

I have found that homeschooling magnifies the couple's relationship. If it is on shaky ground, homeschooling will amplify the differences, especially as disagreements in educational beliefs come out. If the relationship is on solid ground, homeschooling will contribute to the partners' growth together.

That homeschooling can bring out weaknesses in a couple's relationship is not necessarily bad, in my opinion. This does sometimes lead to divorce. But it can also put the partners in the position of having to deal with the problems that are now too obvious to shove aside.

That was the case with us. Because my husband did not believe in homeschooling, we had much to deal with. Besides the issue of educating the children, other related but rarely discussed differences emerged. These equally important issues, such as what is a fulfilling life and how does one have it in our society, could no longer lie hidden and ignored.

After five years of homeschooling, we are still not in total agreement on these issues. Our commitment to our marriage has certainly been tested. But we remain together, committed, and closer despite our differences. While not sold on homeschooling, Keith does see benefits he did not see several years ago. I think we do have more respect for each other. I see homeschooling as a means for continued growth in our relationship. It does not happen overnight, but the trend is in the right direction.

Certainly because the children and I are together so much, I know the children better than my husband does. But that does not keep my relationship with him from being primary. The best assurance our children have for a stable family life is a strong bond between Keith and me. And one of the most important contributions I can make to that bond is taking care of me. As the saying goes, "If Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy."

From Ruth Matulsky (Nf):

Clearly, there is no pat answer as to whether homeschooling will take away from a couple's happiness. Any path we follow may present challenges that are too great for one couple, while a very similar path will be no problem at all to another couple.

All I can write about is our experience. At this point our marriage seems stable and our relationship growing. I have no idea what would have happened had we chosen not to homeschool.

What I have been thinking about are situations unique to homeschooling that could present difficulties for a married couple. At the same time, I'm trying to think about how our style of parenting has helped us to grow closer as a couple and as a family. I also must emphasize that I can't separate out homeschooling from the rest of our lives, because there are other aspects that could definitely be harder on our marriage than homeschooling. We are unschoolers who are trying to follow some semblance of "natural child raising." Four of our kids have been born at home, all were totally fed on mother's milk as babies, we never used walkers, we abandoned cribs, and we gave away our television when our oldest was 5. On top of that we are vegetarians. Who is to say which is the hardest?

Terry and I have been married 23 years. We were together for seven years before Sara was born, and it was a good thing, because it gave us some time to work on our relationship and our way of being together without the distraction of kids. Before the kids, we could talk until three in the morning and sleep late the next day; we could skip meals and be spontaneous. When Sara was born, one of my friends said it was going to be hard for Terry because, "Up until now you have really spoiled him." In truth, we nurtured each other in many nice ways.

Now it is five kids later. Yesterday

we went to the beach, leaving the younger kids with our oldest (who is now 16) and a babysitter, and had lots of time to talk. I ended up saying, as I always do when we have a lengthy stretch together, that in our old age, when the kids are gone, we will have lots to do and say together.

You could say that having kids was our first real joint working venture. Always before our careers had been separate, and while we enjoyed each other's hobbies, we weren't really intensely involved in any hobbies together. But now we needed to learn to work as partners, how to share responsibilities that absolutely could not be postponed.

Choosing homeschooling is a tremendous commitment. Having any kids, let alone five, is a big job. And there are days when I just don't know if I'm going to survive, and I am not a particularly loving wife and Terry is not the nurturing soul he used to be. In our case, I would guess that it is not homeschooling that is the hardest; it is the sheer number of children born to us over a thirteen year period. But it doesn't help that we have chosen to do just about everything the hard way. We haven't taken advantage of any of the respites that are built into American culture. We have chosen to rear our kids in a certain style because it makes sense to us. Our kids our turning out great, and we sometimes think we have a great family life, but in the short run, it is hard.

I think it gets forgotten that almost all of us homeschooling parents spent our childhoods locked up in schools and didn't have much of the freedom that we are now working so hard to secure for our kids. I myself do not feel that I have freedom of motion. For sixteen years I have been working my life around the needs of small children, and there are times when I feel I am in jail because I can't go where I want to go, when I want to and how I want to. I think this is a part of childrearing that is not "natural"; in a tribal community there would be aunts and uncles nearby to spell the parents when they needed to do things separately from the children.

If my kids were in school and preschool I could have days to myself with many more personal options. If I had this large block of time during the day for myself, perhaps I would be less demanding on Terry. Perhaps I would be more understanding. Perhaps our marriage would be better. You know what? I don't really think so. Because what I know is that raising our children this way has forced me to think about issues that I might have ignored otherwise. I think I have made great strides in the way that I think about religion and philosophy, and it is because of the way I am bringing up my children. We have had adventures together that have sparked my own creativity. But it is true that we feel hassled, and that isn't fun. My frustrations run high because I can't usually act on my creative ideas except over a long period of time. Similar to my fantasy of the big yellow school bus taking them all away is my fantasy of what it would be like to have just two or three children over the age of 8 or 9. If I had only my three older children to consider at this point, I could do things like take a long weekend away with Terry. My older kids are dependable and self-sufficient and many people in our community would enjoy having them around while we went away. It is my belief that homeschooling has helped them to be the kind of people that can be trusted – the kind of teenagers who would be fine if left alone. And eventually I suppose my two younger ones will be the same kind of dependable people, although now it is sometimes hard to believe that.

Frankly, when I hear parents of one or two children voice their fears about homeschooling or complain about how difficult it is, I am not always as sympathetic as I think I should be. But at the same time, I picture what I might have been like as the mother of one or two kids. I think I would have been pushy and overly concerned. I certainly would not have insisted on the self-reliance that is so important in making our household run. In a large family, it is impossible to give each child the attention that children in smaller families could receive. Thus, my kids are forced to develop a certain independence that does make them stronger and eventually frees me. For example, this year Sara took a college dance class. She would ride her bicycle or take a college bus through questionable neighborhoods to get to class. Sometimes I felt a little bad about this, but driving her would have interfered with the rhythm of my whole afternoon. At the end of the winter, she is a lot stronger than she was at the beginning, and I see how my involvement in her life can be less and less that of a caretaker. There is no question in my mind that if she had been my only child, I would have driven her. That is my personality. It took me five kids to be able to let up a bit on what I expected from myself and from them.

And that is another stress on homeschooling. Many of our friends and relatives are watching us carefully, waiting for us to fail. One friend who chose *not* to homeschool told me that if she sent her kids to school and they failed, no one would blame her, but if she homeschooled them and they failed, everyone would say it was her fault. Believe me, this is the kind of pressure that can make us homeschooling parents overly attentive, but I have to say that it hasn't really been a problem for Terry and me, perhaps because we both see so clearly that we are doing the right thing.

I often tell people that *educating* my kids is the fun part. I am finally learning geography. April (10) is learning Hebrew and I enjoy it when I have the time to build up my own vocabulary so that we can have conversations. I have read so many good books to the kids. Terry has been able to share stamp collecting and photography and now the computer with one or more of our children. When Jacob was 8, the two of them went to Hawaii to see a solar eclipse, and they were a *team*. And now we have a summer home, and it is a family involvement. Homeschooling has let us develop the skills to work together that are so necessary at our summer place. True, the skills are not perfected yet, but on the good days, I think that we are getting there.

So there you have it. Every now and then I ask Terry if he loves me and he says, "I come home every night, don't I?" I'll let you know in ten years how it's all worked out. ◆

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Focus

"Am I Doing Enough?"

How Young People Handle Occasional Fears or Worries about Their Homeschooling

In My Own Hands

From Calley Ordoyne (MN):

As a general rule, I am pretty comfortable with the way I homeschool and how much work I get done, but I do get uncertain moments now and then. For example, sometimes my school friends will ask me what kinds of things I'm doing in Science or English or something. I mostly unschool, and I like doing that, but when people ask questions like those, it would be nice to be able to say, "I'm halfway through the ninth grade science curriculum. Right now I'm doing the Periodic Table of Elements." Somehow, just saying, "I'm learning about the Periodic Table of Elements" doesn't sound as substantial.

And then that gets me wondering about whether I really am learning enough. Occasionally I hear school kids talking about what they are doing in school, and I wonder if maybe it would be better if I used a more traditional form of learning. But I have statistics and test scores with which to reassure myself and others, and my mom works in a high school and she says that I do at least as much as most ninth graders and more than a lot of them. Also, she got a booklet from the school office that says how many credits a student needs to graduate, and I had done more than a year's worth already. That sort of thing is very comforting.

Also, my mom and I go over what I am studying now and then and see if I need to work harder on something. Sometimes it is reassuring to remind myself that my education is in my own hands and I can learn anything I need to. Other times the thought is no help at all because if I screw up, it's all my own fault.

Getting Perspective from School Students

From Caitlin Fahey (NM):

I'm 14 and have been homeschooling for three years now. Next year I'll be a "freshman," and I think that for a lot of unschoolers my age, this is a time when you do a lot of thinking about how much you are learning. Whenever I mention to someone that I am homeschooled, they will ask me a variety of questions, but sooner or later they always ask, "What are you going to do for high school?" High school seems to be a giant curve in every homeschooler's life, probably because college comes right after. It is a time when you really have to make sure that you are preparing correctly for the field you have in mind, especially if it's a competitive one.

I have worried about what I'm learning throughout my entire homeschooling career. There have probably been a few times when I have felt completely satisfied, but let me tell you, those moments are few and far between. I don't know exactly why I worry. Maybe it's because I spent two years in school, and two more years going part time, and they were constantly pestering me to be up to grade level. I seem to have difficulty accepting the fact that most of the time, quality is better than quantity. For example, occasionally I'll think that I should do ten pages of vocabulary work instead of doing only four but really learning their meanings. I think this just because if I did ten, I'd have an impressive number to put on the daily record of my activities that I keep for my portfolio. Or sometimes I feel that I should spend the entire morning with the few actual textbooks that I have and cram as if I have finals the next day or something. That's another problem I seem to have trouble with: it's as if I feel that to be really learning something, you have to be at a desk poring over an *Anatomy of the Dog* book, instead of having a live animal in front

of you. Or that textbooks are the only way really to learn something. Not to say that they aren't helpful, because some are. I am also learning tons from hands-on and real-life experiences, but sometimes it seems that to prove to myself or to someone else that I have learned something, I have to say that I've completed this-and-such lesson, done this-and-such worksheet, or finished a typing course.

On the other hand, I have seen that finishing a lesson or a course is no guarantee that you have learned something. Once when I talked to my friend about what she was doing in school, I was horrified to discover that she had been taking a typing class for six months and was still stuck on typing three-letter words, while I had just finished teaching myself touch typing from a course in two and a half weeks and was now typing whole letters to people with the greatest of ease.

I have had many experiences with other kids that have made me wonder just what I would be learning if I did go to school. At an orientation for volunteer work at my local zoo, we were put into groups of about six or seven people (age 14 and up). Then we were assigned an animal to read a little about and then write up a sheet with "Did you know?" questions and basic information about the animal. The designated writer for my group had a difficult time getting the ideas we were generating onto paper. She didn't seem to be able to hear information and write it out into a comprehensible sentence without asking someone how she should write it out. There was another time at the zoo when a fellow volunteer and I were writing signs on the chalkboard and sidewalk outside our exhibit, to encourage kids to draw on them with chalk. My friend wrote, "Please draw," and then asked me, "How do you spell 'here' again?"

A month ago, I did a program called Celebrate Youth!, where you work with a mentor for four months and then stay in the dorms at our local university for a weekend and play concerts and attend all of the other performances and presentations that the other students were doing. That probably sounds real hunky dory, but the fact is that it wasn't all that great. The problem, as it turns out, was the students. There were certain rules that we had to obey, such as no boys in the girls' rooms and vice-versa, and everyone except my sister and me disobeyed the rules in one form or another.

So I began to realize that not only am I learning academic skills as a homeschooler, I am also learning emotional and social skills that you can't learn in school because you are too caught up in being cool. It's not cool to interact with grown-ups and, furthermore, most adults in a school situation don't want anything to do with you, so how are you going to learn that skill? It's not even considered hip to be kind and natural to your parents, especially when your friends are around.

I think these situations with school students have reassured me and made me very grateful to have the freedom to learn the way I do. In a way, I think a bit of worrying as a homeschooler is healthy, because the high side of worry is that it keeps you motivated. If we were completely confident all the time, then we would think that we didn't have to work. Also, reading books such as *Real Lives*, by Grace Llewellyn, has helped me to understand that I'm not the only person who feels nervous.

There is a quote from *USA Today* that my mom saved: "Researchers found that children's academic success or failure can be predicted by the amount of constructive learning activity outside of school – during the 25 to 35 hours a week of available waking hours." They also found that "once you account for time spent in lunch, physical education, and other activities, typical public school students spend between 7.5 and 17.5 hours [a week] in a classroom learning." Homeschooling allows me to spend my entire week learning in many different forms, and although this system is not so easily measured, it certainly is my learning process of choice.

I am learning tons from hands-on and real-life experiences, but sometimes it seems that to prove to myself or to someone else that I have learned something, I have to say that I've completed this-and-such lesson, done this-and-such worksheet, or finished a course.

I've Just Been Living

From Elizabeth Powell of Washington

I've never really had any major doubts about if I'm learning the "right" things in homeschooling. I dropped out of school in November of 1995, and since then I've just been living (I'm 13 now).

In this last month I've visited school a few times, to use the computers and to give a talk with another homeschooler on the logging of old growth forests. Being around all of those teachers and kids made me realize that I don't care what they think. Unearthing animal bones in the backyard and saving the little bird that crashed into our window is a lot more important to me than sitting in stuffy classrooms for six hours a day.

I'll admit that sometimes I wonder for a fleeting second if I'm doing enough. One time a school friend of mine said something about what she had learned in science that day. I never said anything to her about it, but for the rest of the day I contemplated whether or not I was learning the right things.

Some people also seem to think that you learn sociability in school, but with me it was the other way around. I was always very quiet in school and never talked much except to my close friends. But being homeschooled has helped me come out of my shell. I've tried new things, like volunteering at the humane society and traveling with my mom.

I can't say exactly how I handle my doubts about whether I'm doing enough, when I have them, because I don't know. I guess I just get so wrapped up in the things I love that I forget about the doubts. Life and learning have always been the same to me. I know that if I take time to enjoy living, knowledge is just around the bend.

If I Need to Know It, I'll Research It

From Mona Weiner (NY):

Although I have been homeschooled all my life, only occasionally do I feel anxious about whether I am learning enough. When I began to think about the topic of this issue's Focus, my first reaction was, "Well, I don't have problems." Then I thought more about it and I realized that I didn't really put much of an effort into learning science or history. I started wondering, "*Do* I know anything about history?" and I started worrying about it.

My mom reads books on history and science out loud to my brother and me, and since the subjects don't really interest me very much, I tend to daydream and think about other things. Then I'll remember that I should pay more attention, so I will, but then I'll think, "Wait, what did she just say?" and I won't be able to remember. I think it's mostly because she's reading to me. When I read by myself, I can't daydream because I have to concentrate on the book or it will never get read. But I'm not really concerned about this, mostly because I do read history by myself and I figure that if I ever feel insecure about my knowledge of history, I can always read more about it. I like history, but it has a wide range of topics, and I like some more than others. However, I'm not really into science. It just has never captured my attention like music or art or English has.

I have a philosophy, though, which is that it is stupid to teach people something that they don't want to know. I mean, if you're being forced to learn about ants when your real passion is making double chocolate fudge triple layer cakes with white chocolate roses on top, and you're currently interested in taking intense cooking courses, then learning about ants is not going to be something you want to do. You're just going to be figuring out how to make candy violets, or something like that, the entire time you're being taught about ants, and the teaching is not going to make an impression on you at all. So, in short, it's a waste of time. I don't think that professional chefs need to know about ants. If a teenager knows what she wants to do professionally, then I think she should just go out and start pursuing it. My best friend, for example, is too busy dancing to do academic work, and maybe that's a career track for her.

I am not interested in science right now, and I think that if I need to know about it, I will research it. I like homeschooling because I can plan my own curriculum or topic that I want to learn about. For instance, I am doing women's studies as history and I'm studying drugs for the subject of health. I think that I'll benefit more from learning things that I want to, as opposed to the situation in school, where I would learn about topics I don't want to and as a result won't know about things that I find important.

When I told my mom I was writing about this topic for GWS, she asked me what I thought about it. I told her basically what I said here, about not really knowing much about history or science. So she asked me some questions, sort of quizzing me, about each subject, and I seem to know more than I thought I did. If you compare my knowledge with that of a high school student, I doubt there would be a wide gap between the two. And I probably know more about English than a lot of high school students do, because that's what interests me most right now and it's what I concentrate on most.

Recently, my mom told me that she thinks I'm doing too many things like writing poetry, playing my bass, writing to my pen-pals, going to concerts, listening to music, socializing, and therefore not concentrating enough on my schoolwork. I don't think that what I choose to do instead of (for example) working on science is unproductive.

So I think that it's not really a big deal if you're not getting lots of academic things done, as long as you're not hanging around watching cartoons in your pajamas. Recently, I told a friend about my mom expressing her concern about my academic work and how I found it unfair. I said that she thought I was being too relaxed about getting "schoolwork" done, and he said to me, "Well, that's what homeschooling *is*," meaning you should be relaxed and concentrate on what you want to do. I agree with that.

Spelling Makes Him Nervous

From Jesse Smith (MD):

The only thing that makes me have a moment of doubt is that I have difficulty spelling sometimes. It does get to me sometimes when I'm trying to get into a program or an activity. I've never actually had a problem because of my spelling, but there's always the fear: "What if?" It's more a fear inside my head than something that actually happens.

This feeling started when I was about 9 or 10, when I got frustrated that I couldn't spell some simple words. I knew I could spell some words, but I'd be stuck on other words and I'd think, "Why can't I spell these words?" At times like that, I would sometimes think that maybe people in school knew all this already and that I should really try to work on it more.

I have lots of friends who go to school, and if we were all playing a game like Mad-Libs, I wouldn't want to be the person who wrote stuff down. Or we'd play a game called Balderdash that requires a lot of writing, and I always had to go ask my mom or dad, "How do you spell this?" But my friends never teased me about spelling. My friends are very understanding and they never made fun of me. Actually, I do know someone who goes to school and had a hard time with spelling, too, but somehow I just felt like since he was in school, he must be more confident about it. That's just how I felt.

When I would get nervous about spelling, I would just try to stay calm and work it out, maybe try to spell out the word in my head. When I wanted to work on spelling, I would try writing essays, which helped a lot. Reading also helps, especially because I'm a very visual person. Homeschooling has been a very good experience for me and except for that one thing, spelling, I've never felt any lack of knowledge. I think I'm very competent in math-

ematics, and it helps if you have something that you do feel especially competent in.

I'm 15 now, and over the past year I've gotten more confident about spelling because I've really improved. I'm not sure why it's gotten easier in the last year. Maybe I was just ready for it, and maybe it's also because I've been reading a lot more.

Talks Out Her Fears

From Catherine Bercier of Louisiana:

I have never been to school. At times, I have pitied the people who have had to spend their days at school, but I confess that, particularly since I have gotten older and have assumed more responsibility for my education, I have had moments of doubt. I have worried that I might be missing out on something. I have sometimes felt frustrated over what I perceive as injustice toward homeschoolers. My school friends have sometimes seemed to have more opportunities for scholarships, technology, awards, friendships, activities, and just plain learning. Their lives have seemed so easy and happy, and though I have known that there are frustrations and disappointments at times, even for them, I have wondered occasionally how my own experience compared with theirs.

I have these times of discouragement despite the fact that I have the incredible grace of being part of a large homeschooling family, two loving parents who have always respected any decision I made in learning, and the awesome support of many homeschoolers my age who live nearby. I have even been able to become friends with many school kids who keep insisting that school is not the big plus that we, who do not attend, imagine it to be. I have often talked to other homeschoolers who have gone through periods of disillusionment and who have graduated and have done well wherever they have landed. Yet, in spite of these incredible gifts of support and awareness, I still find myself being tempted with moments of disillusionment.

When I find myself in a period of negativity, I try to reverse my fears by talking them out with my parents and brothers and sisters. I find that this alone rejuvenates me. Just knowing that my mom and dad really care, and even have moments of discouragement themselves, helps me. I talk to my older home-schooled sisters about the fears they had when they were learning at home. I sometimes even express these fears to homeschooling friends. It's very nice to be able to know and talk with others who are in the same boat.

Many times I have found that my discouragement was due to inadequately exploring subjects in which I was interested or spending too much time on those in which I was not interested. For example, I went through a time when I really could not stand the sight of any math book but always had the nagging feeling that I *had* to do math. Mom saw that my love for math was not growing and encouraged me to spend less time doing math and to do other things instead. Soon, I realized that I could understand problems that I had not even desired to understand before. I even began to have days when I couldn't wait to do math! Since that time, I have realized that even if I had not gained a love of math, what I received just by devoting more time to things that interested me was great in itself. I also feel that letting go and trusting that Mom was right was a tremendous step for me.

No matter how discouraged I became, I never felt that going to school was the answer for me. I just wanted relief – an all-around sense of approbation from everyone with whom I came into contact. But what I have come to realize is that life is full of valleys, not just peaks, and that what you get along the way is all in what you seek to have. I know that bad days will continue to be a part of my life but I'm not worried that my life will have only bad days. I may not be learning everything there is to be learned – this year – but I have a lifetime to learn and the wonderful faith that God is with me. Wow! That's enough! ◆

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Watching Children Learn

Spontaneous Math

Susan Axe-Bronk of Massachusetts writes:

I was very happy to read Carla Stein's letter in GWS #110 about spontaneous math learning on the part of her three children. It inspired me to write about one of our family's math experiences.

Recently, Johanna (9) and Gabe (6), became fascinated with the concepts of the speed of light (after visiting an observatory) and the speed of sound (after hearing their father and me talk about a car which was being designed to travel at the speed of sound). They spoke excitedly and incredulously about the difference between the two speeds and seemed to want to get a handle on it.

One morning, the kids and I were in the kitchen. Gabe was purposefully racing from one end to the other. Asked what he was doing, he told us that he was trying to run faster than the speed of sound. Realizing that he had not broken the sound barrier, as he had not heard a sonic boom, Gabe wanted to know exactly how fast he was running and how close to his goal he was. Johanna was eager to find out also.

This led to a flurry of child-initiated math activity (with consultation provided by me) and a great deal of fun. Finally Johanna and Gabe were satisfied that they understood the vast differences between the speed of Gabe, the speed of sound, and the speed of light. They told me, enthusiastically, "In one second, light travels more than seven times around the earth, sound travels about two blocks, and Gabe travels about twelve feet."

Any concerns I had had about Johanna's covering fourth grade math dissipated when I realized that in the process of covering the mathematical question which she and her brother had posed, she had successfully: used a stopwatch (to time her brother), found an average speed, measured length (of the kitchen floor) by multiplying a unit's length (the tile's) by the number of units, converted linear inches to linear feet, and determined fractions (of a second and of a mile).

Another wonderful aspect of this experience was that Gabe was not restricted to first-grade math, even though he is first-grade age. He participated in many of the calculations with his sister, as he has recently taken an interest in multiplication and fractions, operations which he would not be exposed to or encouraged to explore in the vast majority of first grade classrooms.

Coping with Math Nervousness

Julie Church (CT) writes:

I get nervous when I'm doing math, because I'm always afraid I'll make a mistake. I usually find that if I just take a deep breath and start, then I can finish in a lot less time than if I complain about it (which I often do). For instance, long division. When I first saw what I had to do, I was very upset. My mom had me read about it in a book and she explained it to me, but I was still too churned up to let it sink in. Finally, my dad sat me down and worked me through it, step by step, and now I can do long division without any trouble. Then, whenever I learn a new subject I have to practice – do it several times in a short period of time before it really settles in my mind.

M&M Study: The Results

Sue Smith-Heavenrich (NY) writes:

In GWS #107, we invited folks to participate in our M&M study. Our study, you might recall, began with an argument between our children about whether there were more green M&M's than other colors in a package. Finally we got a package and counted, and made bar graphs to show the color distribution. It was true, not all M&M packages are created equal.

But as with anything, solving one question leads to more. Like: given any particular package, what is the likelihood that you'll get a green one? or an orange one? How many M&M's are in a pack anyway? And is color distribution pretty constant between populations (packages)?

After we invited folks to join us in this study by sending us their population data (total number of M&M's in a bag and how many of each color), we got letters from Australia, Canada, and throughout the U.S., with numbers, pie charts, and bar graphs revealing the contents of 37 small (1.69 oz.) bags, two "pounders," and other assorted sizes. Homeschoolers worldwide sampled and sacrificed 8.9 pounds of M&M's to collect this information. My sons, Coulter and Toby, transferred the raw data onto charts, worked the sums, and made colorful bar graphs illustrating the color distribution in small packages.

First thing we wanted to know was the total number of candies in a small package. If you buy a pack in the U.S., it could contain anywhere from 52 to 62 M&M's. So, what's the average number of candies in a pack? That depends on how you define average. If you want the *mean*, you add up the package totals and divide by the number of packages. The mean number of candies in a pack is 56.

However, if you want to know what

you're most likely to get, you might want to calculate the *mode*. To find the mode, we counted up the number of packs with 52 M's, then 53, and so on. When we graphed this, there were two tall peaks, showing that you're most likely to get 57 M's (21% of the time) or 55 M's (18.9% of the time). This seemed to be the most useful way to answer the question of how many M's you'd probably get in a pack.

Australian packs are a bit bigger, and the average number of candies per pack is 67. For "pounders," the average number of "emmies" is 500, with a range of 498 to 501 candies. Guess it's easier to weigh the pounder than the small packs?

Next, we looked at color distribution. Because blue M&M's were recently introduced, some packages had blues while some still had tans. So, we'll probably need to continue this study for at least a couple of more years until the population stabilizes. In Australia, 9.2% of M's are green, in Canada it's 7%, while in the U.S. it's 7.8%. Browns make up the largest segment of the population in Australia and in the U.S. (27-30%) while in Canada yellows take the lead with 28%. Blues are more common in Canada (21%) than the U.S. (9.5%) and not even included in Australian packages.

Peanut M's have a totally different social structure. The browns are dominant there, but greens make up more of the population (along with yellow and orange). In peanut M&M's it's the reds you find least often. Skittles, on the other hand, have lots of every color, but we'll leave the sampling and number crunching to someone else, as we still have yet to weigh individual M&M's or see how long it takes for one to melt in your mouth. Good luck to all you homeschooling researchers, and remember, math is fun, especially if you can eat it!

Homeschoolers' Geography Club

Gloria Harrison (PA) writes:

I thought other homeschoolers might be interested in our involvement in the National Geography Bee. Wanting my own children to participate, and being told by National Geographic that we needed a minimum of six students in order to participate as a homeschooling group, I put the word out in our local homeschoolers' newsletter and by word of mouth. To my surprise, I got an overwhelming response.

We began by meeting at my house, but when the group grew to 20 children, 12 mothers, and all the younger siblings, we had to do something else. Luckily, a church offered its facilities. We met every two weeks, presented reports on different countries, played geography games, went over old Bee questions (kindly sent to me by Susan Richman of Pennsylvania Homeschoolers), and generally had lots of fun.

The day of the Bee was an exciting one. Although the rules call for just one judge, we chose three, to avoid any question of bias. And in fact, when one of the judges' children became one of the two final contestants, the mother graciously requested to step down from her position.

After the Bee, I was asked if I would carry on with our Geography Club, as we now called it. As I love geography, it was easy for me to agree. Six months later, the club is still going strong, with about 20 kids in it. I believe the youngest is 7 and the oldest is 14. To participate in the Bee, kids must be in 4th to 8th grade, but those who are too young or too old are still members of our club and fully participate in all the activities.

We have been meeting once a month, but come September, we hope to meet twice a month. The kids seem to enjoy team games, rather than breaking up into smaller groups. We had begun with games such as Global Pursuit, by National Geographic, and other board games, which are played in smaller groups, but now I simply let the families borrow my games to take home with them for a month. For the club meetings, I make up team games based on whatever theme we are studying that month. Every month, I announce the theme for the following month, such as "South America," and the kids pick something to research – a specific country, or the Amazon Basin, or the endangered rainforest,

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for example. I encourage lots of hand-drawn or traced maps and visual aids. I strongly discourage reports on exact surface area, exact population, and other statistical information. Those make for very boring reports. It's enough to know that Brazil is the largest country in South America, without going into numerical facts that will soon be forgotten and are not required for the Bee.

Creativity is catching! The children now work hard to present interesting reports. Last month, one family whose relatives had just come back from Bolivia brought several Bolivian artifacts to our meeting. Another month, a family doing Italy brought homemade pizza-like appetizers. Yet another family brought their ethnic doll collection.

Of course, it helps that I was raised abroad and have traveled to five continents. I have stuff from so many countries. The children were thrilled when I brought my collection of costumes from Saudi Arabia, my prayer wheel from Nepal, and my drums from Sri Lanka.

The children also love to play Clue-Me-In, a game in which they write five clues about a country and the other children have to guess the country. They also like Twenty Questions. We do some quiz games loosely following the Bee format, but I altered some rules. For example, when a child is asked a question, he has the choice of answering it on his own, consulting with his team or looking it up on the map or in a reference book. The correct answer will be scored according to which option he chose.

Most of the mothers usually stay for the meeting, although it's OK to drop off your child and go run errands. Most mothers are really interested and are a great help to have around. At the beginning, they helped their children prepare the reports, but more and more, the kids are insisting on doing it on their own. I really enjoy seeing the kids' enthusiasm.

If readers send me a SASE, I will send a price list of what I have available to offer others interested in starting geography clubs in their area: a detailed, five-page description of how to set up a club, copies of old Bee questions, ideas for how to make your

own geography games. Gloria Harrison, RD 11 Box 544, Greensburg PA 15601.

Learning from Pen-Pals

Homeschoolers Oona Jordan and Royanne Sisk have started a newsletter called Pen Pal Junkies, which they say is "for and about pen pals. It features pen pal listings, resources, general articles, and creative writing." Oona wrote in the January/February 1996 issue:

I have around 70 pen pals (although I need to cut it down), which means I mail out about five letters a day. ... Pen paling has given me many close friends. Before I began pen paling, I didn't realize that you could become close friends with someone just by writing to them! I was telling my dad about a friend and how we were becoming really close, and he said, "That's great, hon, is she from your swim team?" I answered, "No, she's from Japan!"

... Before I started pen paling I hated writing. What was the point? Why would I do *that*? But right away when I started pen paling I could see who were the better writers, and they used a thing called paragraphs! This was a novel idea to me. I began to copy the better writers, but soon I didn't have to copy the good writers because I *was* a good writer. I also learned the everyday discipline to sit down and write, something many adults still haven't figured out.

You can also learn a lot about geography by pen paling. My pen pals and I tell each other about where we live. And we talk about our different lifestyles. It was quite the experience explaining something called Burger King to a friend in Zimbabwe.

One of the other things I did was program all my pen pals into a computer program called Lotus 123. I did this so I could print out mailing labels and make graphs and charts. For instance, I charted all my pen pals' birthdays. How many pen pals do I have in NJ? etc.

... I have two maps on the wall, one of the U.S. and the other of the world. I go through my book of pen pal addresses and I pick one. Then I go to the atlas and pinpoint the loca-

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tion of that city. I put a sticker on that city. Eventually I would like to have every person I have ever written to on the maps, although that may take a while!

Subscriptions to Pen Pal Junkies *are $6/six issues, $2/single issue, or just one 32¢ stamp for an introductory free sample.*

Update on Older Readers

Rachel Grapentine (WI) writes:

I wrote in GWS #105 about my sons not reading and being teased for it. They are both reading now. Will, who just turned 9, often sits down and reads. He's worked his way through many of the easy reader books at the library. Both he and Eric (who is 11) are beginning to read the Tintin books, too. Eric didn't seem to care much for easy readers. One of the first books he chose to read was *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and since then he's read a number of chapter books aloud with my help. I'm encouraging him now to read silently.

The teasing from other kids is no longer a problem. We didn't see much of those particular children over the winter, but one day the boy who had teased our boys a lot was here "reading," but really just making up a silly story using some of the words in the book, and Eric and Will were laughing and correcting him, so now he knows they can read. And what is more important, *they* know they can.

By working with Eric and Will, I realize how often one needs to see a word, and in many different contexts, before one knows it. But it does seem that once one knows a certain number of words, learning to read progresses rapidly. It seemed to take my two boys a long time to reach that threshold, but in reality, it's only been about a year. Eric, in particular, went through quite a long period of confusing "on" and "no," "of" and "for," "a" and "I," but he's seemed to have worked through that.

I did have them keep a journal until interest flagged and am looking for other ways to work writing into their daily lives.

They both are paying more attention to print in general. One favorite game has been to quiz each other on the spelling of words on spice cans.

Although the teasing from the other children stopped, one challenge this winter was with my mother. She is a former English teacher, and in spite of what I'd told her, she assumed the boys were at or near grade level. When they spent some time at her house and she discovered they weren't, she became quite upset. She felt they needed three or four hours of academics every day and that they needed to develop good study habits now or they never would. She felt that an unschooling approach has worked well with my oldest, Davin (now 14), but wouldn't work with Eric, who is a much more dreamy child. I was a bit shaken. I still feel that Eric will learn what he needs, when he needs it, but he's on such a different track from society's norm that it creates problems. I have noticed in doing math with him that if a concept seems beyond him, if we wait six months or so, then he has no trouble with it. And I guess that's part of the beauty of homeschooling. If only the educators and lawmakers could see it that way! ◆

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Homeschoolers' Writing Clubs

Helping Children Feel Like Writers

Joanne Turner of Virginia writes:

Since we have had a pretty laid-back approach to education, I never taught Jenny to form her letters. She never had any inhibition about writing from an early age, and she used her own invented spelling. On a rare occasion when she seemed to be forming a letter in an awkward fashion, I might ask her if she wanted to know how some other people did it, and she might or might not say yes. When it came to cursive, we had an alphabet up in our "school room," but she never showed any desire to learn to write more than her signature. However, after we turned in a portfolio of school work at the end of what would have been third grade, and the district said in response that the portfolio "showed no evidence of cursive," Jenny sat down and in a very short time (under a half an hour) copied into cursive a story that she had earlier printed. The story looked very fine and relieved the county's collective mind. I hadn't been worried. She had already taught herself to type and I knew she'd learn cursive in her own time.

Our homeschooling support group held a parents' workshop on writing which I attended when Jenny was 9. We were enthused by all that we learned about how to encourage writing, so the following year we started a writing club for the children. The parents were always available to act as secretaries for the children who wanted to dictate so that their writing could keep up with their thoughts. We never made a big deal about this so even the oldest children (ages 9-13) were not made to feel like babies when they at times used our services. They realized that the ideas coming out on the paper were theirs, not the scribe's.

One of the most moving experiences I had involved helping a young boy. I usually acted as his secretary because Jenny only occasionally wanted this kind of help from me. I first met this boy when he was about 7. He introduced himself to me by saying, "Hi, I'm E____. I'm stupid." He had been in remedial education in school, and other kids quickly let those in remedial education know why they are there; they are the dummies. English was the second language for this family. The county "experts" had, through early intervention, told the family that they should never speak Spanish in front of their son because it would hurt his English ability. So, whenever the extended family got together, they would fall silent when E___ came into the room and resume their conversation when he left. So he didn't get exposed to language in his extended family setting – no family stories, no development of his ear for Language when he could have been bilingual. Criminal!

Anyway, during his second year of homeschooling and participating in our writing club, we worked on a Christmas poem. I took down all of his ideas and remembrances from his past Christmases. He arranged them sequentially by answering my questions. When I read back to him the end product, which was still completely in his own words, his eyes filled with tears and he stammered out, "Does this mean ... could I really be ... could I be an author?" I quickly reassured him that he was and that I loved his poem, that it was a beautiful and moving Christmas story.

One of the many advantages of our writing club is that the children feed off each other, and this spurs them to write. When Jenny used an idea that E___ had used in his story, he was so proud that an idea of his had been so good that one of the big kids would use it. Another time, D___ came in with a "choose-your-own-path" story. The next meeting, another child came in with one, and the following meeting, Jenny brought one, and the children asked if they could do one as a group exercise, so we all did. We used a story starter about going out to the mailbox which is full of letters, and which letter you open determines how you start your adventure. Each child wrote a different story about the contents of each letter. Out of that grew a book written, edited, self-published, and sold by twelve homeschooled children ages 6-13.

The writing club has been meeting twice a month for the past five years. Generally, the participating young people (ages 5-15) bring something they have written which they are willing to share with the group. After listening quietly, the group gives some positive feedback about what we liked about the story. Unless someone feels they need more information about what is going on in the story, we try to stay away from any negative comments. If someone suggests a change that they think would improve the piece, we've made it clear that all the writer has to say is "Thank you," and they are then free to change the piece or ignore the suggestion. Most of the growth and improvement in their writing has come just from the fact that they are writing regularly (and they mostly read a lot).

After each young person has read

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his or her piece and gotten feedback, we do a short exercise. This is something that I come up with, although I often use suggestions from the children. They work on the exercise briefly while we are together, and they never have to finish it or work on it again unless they decide to on their own. Over the years we have tried various forms of poetry, worked on descriptive adjectives, writing clear directions, writing biographical sketches, describing a character using conversation, changing a story into a play.

Now that some of the members have gotten older, I'm sponsoring a teen writing club. This was in response to Jenny's and others' request, so that they could focus more on improving their skills. In this club, the other parents don't stay since they have younger children to attend to and we no longer need secretaries.

As a side note, the children made it very clear from the start that they did not want the parents to share their own writing. Very few of the young people in this group write more than an occasional nonfiction piece, and since they felt that this is what most of us would do, they were not interested in hearing our writing. Jenny says that our stuff is boring. It is also possible that they may have felt they would be intimidated if our use of language far exceeded what they were capable of at the time.

Offering Useful Feedback

[SS:] Several people have told me that, like Joanne, they find that simply offering feedback about the strong parts of a piece of writing and giving the children a chance to write regularly are all it takes to make a writing group feel successful. I hope that makes many of you who have hesitated to form a writing group feel more confident about trying it – and remember, a group can be just the kids in one family, or one child and a friend – it doesn't have to be big to work well.

At the same time, I also know that parents often wonder how to offer comments or suggestions about parts of a piece of writing that seem unclear or that seem to need more work. From the questions people ask me, I know that this is where people can feel especially at a loss. It's one thing to say what you liked about a story, but how do you mention what you think needs work without completely offending and alienating the young writer? This seems to come up not just when parents are running writing groups but when they are dealing with their children one-on-one as well.

Recently, a friend of mine who was facilitating a homeschoolers' writing group asked me for some advice about how to do it, and I summarized some strategies that have worked for me in the past. I offer them here for those of you who may be struggling with the questions I just described. As with all such things, don't expect to apply these ideas rigidly; adapt them to your own situation.

Ideas for questions to ask the group after one child reads a piece aloud:

"What parts especially helped you to see what was happening/imagine it/picture it in your mind?"

This is an easy question to start out with, and it gives the writer a lot of encouragement right away because the answers will naturally be about parts of the piece that the group especially liked. At the same time, it's a more specific question than, "What did you like about the story?" Right away, it introduces the notion that critical reading is about focusing on parts of the piece and thinking about what works well and what doesn't. It also introduces the notion that a frequent aim of writing is to help readers see or imagine or understand something, so that one of the most helpful things a reader can do is to say, "This is what got it across to me, this is what helped me see."

"Was there anyplace where you wanted to know more or hear more?"

In my experience, this works well as a simple, beginning way to generate suggestions for revision. I find that kids (or anyone) usually respond well to the request for more (e.g., "I wanted to know more about what her room looked like," "I wanted to hear

Forming a Supportive Group

Susan Richman writes in her book Writing from Home:

In thinking about kids who might come to your [writing group], I think it's important to look at the balance of personalities and see how each has an important role to play. One boy, new to homeschooling this year and new to our group, is just beginning to find his writer's voice, and his pieces are usually short and he doesn't yet feel they are particularly inspiring to the others. But he immediately began taking another very positive role – a very enthusiastic appreciator. He was the one who immediately remembered where fourteen-year-old Ian had left off in his long chapter story about a king and his cohorts: "You were right at the part where the genie is just about to tell his life story! That was really funny. I can't wait to hear the next part today!" Who doesn't enjoy having someone around who really listens and remembers and cares?

Some of the children are naturally shy and quiet, and having someone read their pieces for them is a must most of the time. Writing gives them a chance to be heard saying what they never could have spoken out loud. We have a special opportunity to join in their worlds a bit through their writing. Although an entire group made up of very quiet children might never get off the ground, these children can still offer a lot to a supportive group.

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more about how she felt when her mother said that," etc.) because such requests imply that the readers are curious and interested. The useful thing about this way of phrasing the question is that even when a reader or listener feels a story is lacking in some way – e.g., the description of the room was pretty flat, or the story didn't tell enough about how the girl felt – he can frame this criticism in a constructive request for more, and in a way that is actually likely to inspire the writer to go back and add more in.

"Is there anything you didn't understand/anything that wasn't clear to you?"

After so many positive and encouraging responses, the writer is usually fairly able to hear answers to this one, especially if the spirit of the comment is, "I didn't get this and I want to because I'm interested and want to understand what's going on/what you mean/who was speaking, etc." If listeners do have such comments, you might then ask them to follow their comment with a suggestion, by saying, "Do you have a suggestion about how she could clear that up?" or "What would have made that clearer to you?"

Another way is to ask the writer, "Does that give you an idea of how you could make it clearer?" Often, simply hearing what wasn't clear gives the writer an idea of how to fix it. For example, if one listener says, "I couldn't tell who was speaking," the writer may come up with the idea of saying, "her father said," after the line in question.

Here, also, are some things you might ask the writer:

"What were you hoping to do with this piece?" or "What's the main thing you hope readers get out of this?"

This focuses the writer's thoughts on her goals and purpose, and it's usually more appropriate to ask when the piece is non-fiction than for fiction or poetry (although it may be appropriate there too). A child who has written a piece about *Anne of Green Gables* might say, "My goal was to encourage people to read *Anne of Green Gables*" or "My goal was to show the difference between *Anne of Green Gables* and other books about young girls." That tells the listeners what she's hoping to achieve, and they can give her some specific feedback about whether or not she has succeeded.

"What do you want to know from us, your readers?" or "Is there anything you were wondering about that we can tell you?"

This is admittedly somewhat more sophisticated, but if it feels right, you can ask some form of it because it begins to suggest to the writer that she can think about what she wants from her readers and how she wants to take advantage of their availability. Some answers a writer might give to this question are, "I wasn't sure if it made sense that Sally would be happy about moving away. Did that make sense to you, or were you confused about it?" or "I wondered if I told enough about what the book was about to make you want to read it. Did I?" In other words, this question encourages writers to reflect on some of their own thoughts or decisions they made while writing. It also reminds everyone that the function of readers, in a workshop like this, is to be useful to the writer.

Whether or not I ask any of these latter questions – in other words, even if I stick to just having the other kids give feedback – I try to end by asking the writer, "Have our comments given you some ideas for how to go back and work on this some more?" I do this because I want to end with the sense that this is *not* the end, that they can take all these comments and use them as they work more. Of course, it's totally up to them whether they actually do work more on that particular piece, and they may decide not to. That's fine, and in fact it's important to me that they feel they have that choice. But still, the goal (for me) is to distinguish this process from the feeling the child would have if she read a completely finished piece to the group. In other words, it's a rehearsal, not the final performance. Getting feedback of this kind is something you do while you're still in the middle of working on something. So in an important way, a successful workshop is one in which the writer leaves feeling, "Now I'm full of things to go home and work on!" ◆

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Responding to Each Other's Work

Nathan Williamson wrote in GWS #77 about the homeschoolers' writing club he belonged to:

When you start a writing club, as in most new situations, you don't really feel comfortable with everybody else, so most of the comments are in the category of, "That was really brilliant," or "I liked that a lot." As we began to know each other more intimately, we started giving more comments about what we really felt, not just what we thought the others would like. We started being able to say, "I liked that part of the story, but I think you could do something else better with this other part." That will come when everybody feels really comfortable with everybody else.

It's not really that helpful for you, as a writer, to hear, "That was great." You don't learn as much from the fact that they liked it. If they tell you something that they didn't like, you have something to work on. ... When people don't comment, it becomes more of a story hour than a writing club. You're just listening to other people's writing, so it's more of a reading club.

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Visit Tropical Research Institute

Mary Schultz writes from Panama:

We are Lucas (5), Nat (8), Tobias (12), Rick (40), and Mary (43). We have lived for the last five years in a small community (Gamboa), about 17 km outside of Panama City, next to the Panama Canal, in the middle of a protected rain forest. Gamboa houses Panama Canal Commission employees, private Panamanian citizens, five permanent Smithsonian staff scientists, and numerous visiting scientists. It is a very safe community where kids can play outside all day (and all night if they want).

Rick is a staff scientist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institution; his work is primarily concerned with tropical forest ecology. Rick is also a serious bird watcher, and Gamboa is a superlative location for bird watching (we wake every morning to the cacophony of hundreds of parrots leaving their roosts).

I used to teach college writing and literature in the U.S.. Two years ago, I taught high school English for one year at the International School of Panama. We all became unschoolers after that experience. *Free at Last* and *The Teenage Liberation Handbook* reflect our family's approach to education (I no longer work outside our home).

Tobias is a serious Nintendo game player, has been writing a novel based on the Nintendo game Cronotrigger since January (now over 300 single-spaced pages), participates in an internet Star Trek role-playing game, and is an avid roller-hockey player and avid reader. He would really like a good friend who shares his interests.

Nat shares all of Tobias's interests, but his great loves are dinosaurs, whales, and astronomy. He is able to identify over 50 constellations. His favorite thing is to play outside with other kids.

Lucas's passions revolve around reptiles and insects. He has his own pet tarantula and scorpion. He collects tadpoles and frogs (there are beautiful species here).

We have been thinking about opening our home to an interested teenage unschooler. We can offer a unique opportunity to experience the tropical rain forest firsthand and to live within a scientific community. What's in it for us? We would enjoy the company of an older unschooler. All the other Smithsonian children attend school, as do all the Panamanian and American children in Gamboa. There is a large American military presence in Panama with an active homeschooling community, but we find that we have little in common with them. Frankly, we would like some friends who are a little more like us.

We're not rich. We have a spare room for someone, and food enough, but our visitor would have to pay for all other expenses. We would not expect that she or he would work for us (we have a full-time housekeeper), but we would hope that she or he would *want* to play with some of us. There's plenty to do and experience just hanging out with our family, but there are also many, many other scientists working here, so there is always the possibility of getting involved in scientific projects. (There is little likelihood of any kind of *paid* apprenticeship, however.)

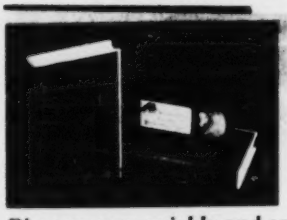
We are open to talking with anyone interested in visiting us. Email is the best way to reach us: schultz@pananet.com. (See the Directory at the back of this issue of GWS for the family's postal address.)

Work on Minnesota Farm

Dick Gallien writes:

The Winona Farm is 175 acres, at the junction of two trout streams, protected by 600-foot hills, on the edge of Winona, Minnesota. This farm is protected by the Minnesota Land Trust and searches for the healthiest ways to demonstrate the "cycle of life." We already have good start because we've enriched the farm soil with the endless flow of leaves, grass, and brush-tree grindings that flow from Winona. The next step, of producing healthy, organic food on this rich soil, is a tougher challenge. I'd like to find a few non-schoolers with energy, vision, and an interest in simple, healthy living to help demonstrate what the human organism can do when it is excited by an idea and

BACK TO HOMESCHOOL



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pursues it to wherever it may lead.

Deb, a homeschooling mother, came here eight years ago. Her computer drafting and building design skills provided her income and were essential in building an upstairs apartment for her and her two sons, plus two tourist cabins. There are three bedrooms in the farmhouse which I have rented to singles, who then shared the kitchen. From now on, I would like to find non-schoolers to fill these spaces. They might stay a few days or for years. In lieu of rent, I am looking for people who see the potential this farm has for the non-schooling movement. I want the farm to be a place where those interested in taking an active part in improving the environment and wildlife habitat, raising their own food in a garden and greenhouse, and living a clean, spartan life can find other non-schoolers with similar interests.

If interested, write The Winona Farm, Rt 2 Box 279, Winona MN 55987 or call 507-454-3126. ◆

Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our last issue. Our complete 1996 Directory was published in GWS #108. Our Directory is not a list of all subscribers, but only of those *who ask to be listed*, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information - last name, full address, and so on. Tell us if you would rather have your phone number and town listed instead of your mailing address (we don't have space to list both).

If a Directory listing is followed by a **(H)**, the family is willing to host GWS travelers who make advance arrangements in writing.

If a name in a GWS story is followed by a state abbreviation in parentheses (e.g. "Jane Goldstein (MA) writes...") that person is in the Directory. If the name is followed by the entire state name (e.g. "Jane Goldstein of Massachusetts writes...") then that person is not in the Directory. We are happy to forward mail to those whose addresses are *not* in the Directory. If you want us to forward the letter without reading it, mark the *outside* of the envelope with writer's name/description and the issue number. If you want us to read the letter and then forward it, please enclose another stamped envelope.

When you send us an address change for a subscription, please remind us if you are in the Directory, so we can change it here, too.

Please remember that we can't control how the Directory is used; if you receive unwanted mail as a result of being listed, just toss it out or recycle it.

AK — Linda & Rob BROWN (Rebecca/83, Ezekiel/89, Reuben/92) PO Box 782, Cordova 99574 (H)

CA, North (zips 94000 & up) — Lynn KUTSAL (Alexandra & Taylor/88, Delaney/95) 3509 Clayburn Rd, Antioch 94509

CA, South (zips to 94000) — Diana & Holger LEIHE (Joshua/92, Aaron/94) 630 N Hollywood Way #102, Burbank 91505 **(H)** ••• Gary & Susan PENDER (Colin/88, Alexa/92) 3180 Sicily Av, Costa Mesa 92626 ••• Rick & Suzanne SOULE (Kevin/90, Tracy/92) 1810 Spyglass Cir, Vista 92083 ••• Robert & Marina TIDWELL (Ted/88, Tom/91, Colin/94) 9041 1/2 Krueger, Culver City 90232

IA — Craig & Kathy GIDDINGS (Clay/83, Kelsey/86, Kyle/87, Cameron/90) PO Box 291, Burt 50522 **(H)**

MA — Dorrie CHAMPAGNE (Laura/90) 68 Hanover St, W Springfield 01089 ••• Kim KAUFMAN & Bruce McCARTER (Noah/90, Emily/96) 161 Jug End Rd, Great Barrington 01230-9724 (change) ••• Mary LEE & Mike WORTHY (Chris/83, Lizzie/87) 15 Westvale Dr, Concord 01742 ••• Sidney MITCHELL (Matthew/88, Roy/90) 36 Taft Hill Pk, Roslindale 02131-1717 (change) ••• Kathleen O'KANE & Darien GARDNER (Nolan/87, Ciara/91) 51 Pilgrim Dr, Northampton 01060

MN — Alison GREEN & Danny CHANG (Kelan/94) 15216 Afton Blvd S, Afton 55001-9734 ••• Jana & Karl KLEVEN (Anna/92, Katie/95) 4537 Penn Ave N, Minneapolis 55412

NH — Terry & Luigi AMATO (Fernando/83, Monica/85, Nicoletta/88, Alyssa/90) 8 True Rd, Seabrook 03874

NJ — Maria & Robert DOLAN (Alexander/88, Nicholas/92) 3402 Sandpiper Way, Box 221, Allenwood 08720 **(H)** ••• Lawrence KURTZ & Debra O'LEARY-KURTZ (Jesse/84, Micah/89, Daniel/93) 121 N Hartford Av, Atlantic City 08401 ••• Susan & Patrick YANANTON (Leah/80) PO Box 458, Manasquan 08736

NY — David & Margaret ADAMITIS (Krista Ann/85, Rachel/87, Lara/89, Sarah/94) 94 W Main St, Cuba 14727 **(H)** ••• Sharon FITZGERALD & Richard CHERRY (Ada/85, Irene/87, Garnet/90, Jasper/94) 110 Demarest Mill Rd, W Nyack 10994 ••• Eugene & Barbara GREGOR (Alexander/89, Sonia/92, Hanna/95) 18 Overton Rd, Scarsdale 10583 ••• Benita & Steve OLIVER (Brittany/90, Brea/93, baby/96) 19 Walnut St, Troy 12180

NC — Lisa & Jim TEVIA-CLARK (Taija/90) PO Box 207, Brasstown 28902

OH — Lowell & Sandy KUNTZ (Jay/88, Beth/90, Jeff/95) 8110 Falknor Rd, Covington 45318

PA — Jim & Tami DANZL (James/82, Cassie/84, Amanda/88) 417 Finnin Rd, New Kensington 15068-6807

RI — Melanie & Dan SPERRY (Kyler/85, Nathan/86, Jackson/93) 274 Carpenter Rd, Hope 02831

VT — John & Patti GALLAGHER (Cara/90, Luke/91) 420 S Winooski Av, Burlington 05401 ••• Judy & Stephen SELIN (Lindsay/87, Morgan/90) 91 Falls Rd, Shelburne 05482 ••• Liane TYRREL & Peter WALKER (Ethan/90, Olivia/92) 8 Ethan Allen Ave #18, Colchester 05446 **(H)**

WA — Karen CROWN (Jade/82) 1516 7 Av SW, Olympia 98502 **(H)** ••• Patti PITCHER (Becca/81, Laura/84, Heidi/90, Aidan/95) 5526 26 Av NE, Seattle 98105

WI — Phil & Janice ZINDEL (Sarah/87) 5120 Wilsch Rd, Conover 54519 (change) **(H)**

Canada:

NB — Elaine MANDRONA (April/84) Box 2227, Sussex E0E 1P0 **(H)**

ON — Karen GOLIGHTLY & Russ WALKER (Harris/89, Robyn/93) 70 Delaware Av, Hamilton L8M 1T7 **(H)** ••• Angela RANA (Abaid-Ullah/89, Maryam/91) 1095 Neilson Rd #1104, Scarborough M1B 5K5 ••• Alison SCOTT & Brent WOOD (Ceilidh/93) 125-700 Parkhill Rd W, Peterborough K9J 7W9

Other Locations — Karin & John DAVIDSON (Hannah/90, Zak/93) bei Pehle, Calvinstrasse 13, 10557 Berlin, **Germany (H)** ••• Susanne FRENZ & Mark LINCK (Amanda/86, Sara/91) Apto 100, Punta Banda 22791, Baja, California **Mexico (H)** ••• Jim RATZ & Lantien CHU (Mei Loong/88, William/93) 82 Hu Ti Lu, Yangmingshan 113 Taipei, **Taiwan**, ROC **(H)** ••• Mary SCHULTZ & Richard CONDIT (Tobias/84, Nat/87, Luc/91) Smithsonian Tropic Research Institute, Unit 0948, APO AA 34002 (**Rep. of Panama**)

Groups to add to the Directory of Organizations that was published in GWS #108

MI — OWL (Oakland, Washtenaw, Livingston) Homeschool Support Grp, c/o Debra Cohn, 6036 Seven Mile, S Lyon 48178, 810-437-8931

General — At Our Own Pace, c/o Jean Kulczyk, 102 Willow Dr, Waukegan Il 60087, 847-662-5432 (newsletter for homeschooling families with special needs)

Heart of Homeschooling, ed. Shari Henry, PO Box 1055, Madison AL 35758, email ShariHenry@aol.com (newsletter based on work of Charlotte Mason, Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, Raymond and Dorothy Moore, and others)

Address Changes:

CA — HCL Boston School (formerly School of Home Learning), PO Box 2920, Big Bear City 92314; 909-585-7188 ••• Whittier Homeschoolers, 7432

(cont. on next page)

ENTRY FORM FOR DIRECTORY

Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS.

Adults (first *and* last names):

Organization (only if address is same as family):

Children (names/birthyears):

Full address (Street, City, State, Zip):

Are you willing to host traveling GWS readers who make advance arrangements in writing? Yes ___ No ___

Are you in the 1996 Directory (GWS #108)? Yes ___ No ___
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Duchess Dr, Whittier 90606; 310-695-7646

IL — HOUSE, 806 Oakton, Evanston 60202; 312-847-7129 (statewide group)

MA — Mass. Home Learning Assoc, PO Box 1558, Marstons Mills 02648; Western Mass. contact Loretta Heuer, 508-429-1436; Eastern Mass. contact Kathy Smith, 508-249-9056

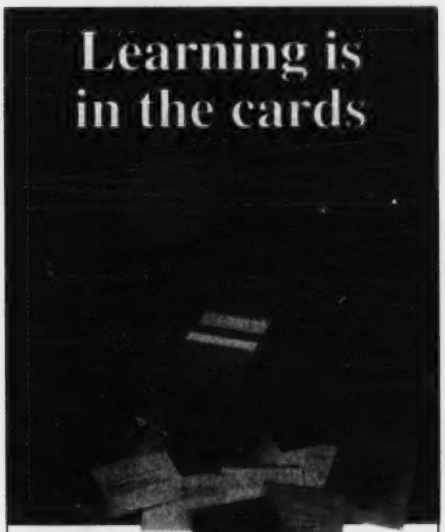
VA — LEARN, c/o Vernon, 1111 Waynewood Blvd, Alexandria 22308

Canada — Yukon Home Educators' Society, Box 4993, Whitehorse YT Y1A 452

Spain — Aprender Sin Escuela, c/o Szil-Norberg, Apartado 45, Alfaz del Pi 03580, Alicante

Pen-Pals

Children wanting pen-pals should write to those listed. Please try to write to someone on the list before listing yourself, and remember to put your address on your letter. To be listed here, send name, age, address, and 1-3 words on interests. ••• Lydia RAYMOND (9) 811 U St, Port Townsend WA 98368; swimming, dancing, art ••• Toft BRAGG (7) PO Box 623, Fredonia AZ 86022; computers, inventions, puzzles ••• TYRREL-WALKER, 8 Ethan Allen Av #18, Colchester VT 05446: Ethan (6) baseball, stamp collecting, puzzles; Olivia (4) books, tea sets, dolls ••• MAXEY, 486 South N St, Livermore CA 94550-4356: Maresa (14) veganism, skateboarding, music; Tamara (11) veganism, animal rights, rollerblading ••• Onolee BOCK (11) 5111 Old Bald Hill Rd, Hemlock NY 14466; dancing, reading, little kids ••• Catherine TATSCH (10) 9070 Longmont Dr, Dallas TX 75238; art, animals, reading ••• Abby NIZIOL (7) 500 Nye Rd, Cortland NY 13045; coloring, piano, pressing flowers ••• SELIN, 91 Falls Rd, Shelburne VT 05482: Lindsay (8) art, animals, reading; Morgan (6) dancing, violin, cooking



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TEACHER: Small alternative school in rural Nova Scotia, Canada looking for teacher. Knowledge of Waldorf or Enki approaches necessary. Apply to Mary MacEachern, RR #2, Scotsburn, Nova Scotia B0K 1R0, 902-485-9340 or email nbremac@atcon.com

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Non-schooling, village-type sustenance community now forming. For information: Mark & Mary Van Doren, PO Box 121, New Marshfield OH 45766, 614-664-2243.

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Book Reviews

The Abacus by Jesse Dilson #3322 $12.95 +$3.50 s/h

The Math Kit, by Ron Van Der Meer & Bob Gardner #3310 $35 + $5 s/h

I am still amazed that in my adult life I have learned to enjoy and think about math, since as a child I was constantly befuddled and cowed by math in school. What has made a difference and led to my newfound enjoyment of math is, first of all, being around people who use math for real-life purposes, and, second, learning about math in contexts other than textbook problems. The two books I review here are examples of those different contexts.

The Abacus is a delightful little book that was first published several years ago. It was written so well that when it was reprinted last year, the only update the editors felt was needed was to include a small but fully functional Chinese abacus with the book. The author has a chapter describing how to make your own abacus, but there is something to be said for immediately being able to put your hands on the abacus, rather than having to build one first. The author describes an abacus's functions with clear, easy-to-follow prose, but learning how to use an abacus is only part of the book. Its opening chapters offer a short history of numbers that shows how different counting systems and devices were devised by various cultures. Then the discussion moves into the history of the abacus, and, in an unusual but highly effective turn, it moves into the history of the development of computers and how the binary number system of the abacus is the foundation of today's personal computers.

The Abacus is written for people aged around 11 and up, I'd say, but it is so clearly done that parents can read it aloud and use it with younger children as well. By learning about math in the context of history and invention, I gained a lot of insights that aided my mathematical thinking. It also occurs to me that, for those who learn best by touching and making things or by hearing stories about how people invented things, this book can be a boon.

The Math Kit is described by its authors as "a 3-D Tour Through Mathematics," and the book lives up to its billing. It is not a text or instruction manual, but rather a series of activities, puzzles, demonstrations, and anecdotes that put math in the context of activity. This kit enables you to use math to do things, such as determine the angle at which you want to make a tree fall, or determine the odds of winning a horse race. There are also many opportunities to play with math; tangram puzzles, logic puzzles, and geometry and probability games are included. You'll also find pop-up displays, hidden objects and words that need special glasses to be seen (the glasses are included), 3-D models of geometric figures, and graphic representations of the multiplication tables and other properties of arithmetic.

If the short text that accompanies each game or object, or the little manual at the back of the book, doesn't explain to your satisfaction the math embedded in these activities, you can refer to another book such as *Arithmetic Made Simple* or *Mathematics: A Human Endeavor* (both available here). Don't expect to get a math textbook when you buy *The Math Kit*. Instead, it's an opportunity to explore math in a hands-on way with your kids – or on your own! You'll be able to *feel* just what a polyhedron is. You'll be able to supplement your understanding, or your explanations to children, of the multiplication tables, or division, or calculus, with the kit's clever manipulatives. Though expensive, this is a kit you will use over the years to illustrate and explore many concepts. It's a math manipulative museum in a book, and like any good museum, it can be visited and enjoyed again and again. — Pat Farenga

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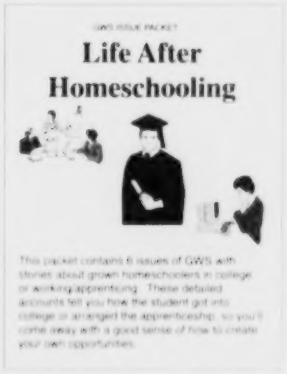
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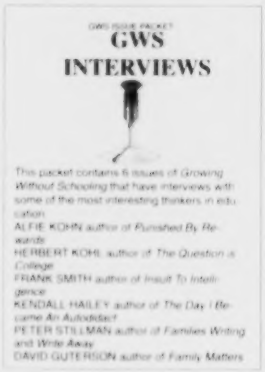
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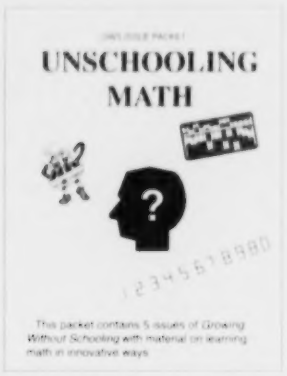
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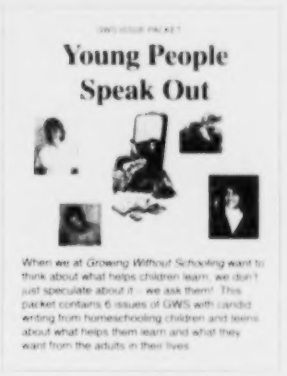
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GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING

Issue 113

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Homeschooling in South Africa
Involving Children in Work
Learning Exchanges

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NOV./DEC. '96

GWS

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BY JOHN HOLT

EDITOR - SUSANNAH SHEFFER • PUBLISHER - PATRICK FARENGA • BOOKKEEPER & EDITORIAL ASSISTANT - MARY MAHER • OFFICE MANAGER - DAY FARENGA • SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER - RANDI KELLY • SHIPPING MANAGER - PHIL CRANSHAW • CATALOG ORDER PROCESSOR - STEVE COBB • CLERK - KIM WEBB • COMPUTER ADMINISTRATOR - GINGER FITZSIMMONS • OFFICE ASSISTANTS - JENNIFER FITZSIMMONS-GAUGER, DAWN LEASE, MARION WEBSTER

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In this issue

If we've had a difficult or painful experience as a child, how do we assimilate that experience as an adult? Do we say, "It was hard, but I got through it, so my children can too"? Or do we vow, "There's got to be another way!"

As you'll see in this issue's Focus, long-time homeschooling father Manfed Smith suggests that men may often choose the former approach, which may then incline them to resist the idea of homeschooling. "In a strange way," Manfred writes, "school can become almost a perverse rite of passage for men, something that they had managed to do *in spite* of all the obstacles thrown in their path as opposed to *because* of the obstacles." Having survived it, they expect that their children can – or perhaps it's "should learn to" – survive it too. We decided to ask two fathers who are very involved in their children's homeschooling to reflect on Manfred's comments, to explore the roots of some fathers' discomfort with homeschooling as well as to explain why they themselves feel differently.

When I talk to people about homeschooling, it strikes me that for some, it's incredibly difficult to admit that some aspects of schooling, or growing up, were not only harmful but were actually unnecessary. "You mean I didn't have to go through that?" is a hard truth to accept. As Alice Miller points out in *For Your Own Good*, people will go to all sorts of lengths to avoid having to confront that possibility. It can be easier to insist that one's experiences were necessary, and therefore are equally necessary for one's children, than it is to accept that there is another way and to allow children that alternative.

One thing the fathers in this issue make clear is that it's easier to offer this alternative – this liberation – if you've already examined and at least begun to come to terms with your own previous experience. Joe Kelly describes how it was initially difficult, at times, to allow his daughters to stay home from school, because he had not had that option as a child and part of him felt like saying, "This is school! You have to go!" But once parents examine their own experiences, they can begin to find, or recognize, other possibilities. Thus Joe describes other rites of passage, other ways of marking a young person's growth. One doesn't need to reject, out of hand, the entire concept of a rite of passage. Instead, as with so many other things as well, homeschoolers manage to reclaim the concept in a more natural and authentic way. I think of the homeschooler I know who chose to design her own coming-of-age ritual at age 16. She created a ceremony that was tailored to her own particular passage and that took place at exactly the time she felt it appropriate – unlike school's graduation ceremonies which often come before, or long after, the students feel ready.

In this as in so many other areas, it turns out that there is indeed another way. The fathers in this issue suggest that even if some may start out resisting homeschooling, it's possible to move beyond that to a point at which their children's freedom becomes inspiring rather than frightening. – Susannah Sheffer

Unschooling in the News

[SS:] The popular press seems to have discovered unschooling. Reporters nowadays often call and say something like, "I understand there's a new kind of homeschooling going on, where the kids don't use a set curriculum." I admit that I kind of like letting these folks know it's not unschooling that's new, it's their coverage of it. I don't necessarily say this outright, but I can hear their surprise when they ask how long we've been publishing GWS and I say, "Since 1977." Not such a new phenomenon after all!

Of course, it's wonderful to spread the word that young people really can learn without assignments or grades or other similar school trappings. Sometimes reporters interview a grown unschooler for their story, and such interviews illustrate quite vividly that unschooling works and that it's been around long enough for a 19- or 20-year-old to have been doing it all his or her life. A nice example of such an article was one written by Mike Bowler in the 7/6/96 *Baltimore Sun*. This is a good one to pass along to skeptical relatives. Here's an excerpt:

Jamie Smith never went to school until she earned a perfect 4.0 grade average last year in her freshman year in college. Well, not school as most of us know it. Smith was educated at her Columbia [MD] home from the day of her birth 19 years ago until she took three courses at Howard Community College before enrolling full-time at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

She never took a formal examination until she tackled the Scholastic Assessment Test and scored 1,320 out of a possible 1,600. She never got a grade in any subject until she entered college and never was placed in a school "grade" – never a fourth grader or a high school sophomore.

... Said her UMBC calculus instructor, Bonny Tighe, "Jamie largely taught herself higher-order mathematics. She has a perfect score in this class. If I had whole classes like Jamie, I'd be a very happy woman."

... For Jamie Smith, being educated meant lots of reading, a minimum of textbook work in such subjects as mathematics, and many field trips. ... She said she was "quite independent" by the time she reached high school age. "It would have been silly to give me grades by that time," she laughed, "because I was the one who was grading me."

Her father took her to his public school [where he is a middle school Social Studies teacher] several times a year and allowed her to sit in for a day.

"I saw so many students who felt forced to be there," she said. "For me, home education meant finding myself and learning to love learning for its own sake."

Smith demolishes two stereotypes about homeschooling. One is that without the socialization that goes with formal schooling (particularly in high school), without the proms and the sports and the prep rallies, homeschooled students arrive at college stunted.

"I never missed any of it," Smith said. "I was involved with a number of activities – skating, swimming, Girl Scouts, had lots of friends and some boyfriends. ..."

Said [Vice Provost at UMBC] Charles M. Woolston, "We're finding it's a stereotype that homeschooled students aren't well socialized. More and more of them appear to be well ahead of their age group in social maturity, and Jamie is a good case of that."

The other stereotype is that homeschoolers have a major problem with the teenage rebellion all kids go through: their teacher is the natural enemy. Smith denied she went through a rebellious stage, and her mother, Jeanne, concurred.

"Of course, you're going to have disagreements; everyone does," Jeanne Smith said, "but the rebellion period is probably worse when you're in school."

Jamie Smith said she would feel herself "getting dragged down" when she heard her teen friends complaining about their parents. "I was always close to my parents, and I never felt the way some of my friends did." ...

Homeschooling in South Africa

Kate Durham writes from South Africa:

I am the Secretary of KwaZulu Natal Home Schooling Association in South Africa. We are in a unique situation in this country where new education laws are being drafted at both the national and the provincial (state) level. For the first time in our history, home tutoring is recognized as a legitimate education alternative in our education laws, which is great. What is not great, though, is that we will be subject to an approval clause and various other conditions which will make home education available in name only to the majority of families wanting to choose this option.

Kate sent us a copy of an article she wrote for a South African newspaper. The article begins by summarizing the success of homeschooling in the United States and then goes on to say:

Many South African parents are concerned about the quality of education in the public schools and would choose private schools with lower teacher-pupil ratios, but these are expensive. Parental choice should however be a reality for all parents, not just the well-heeled elite. This is why home schooling is expected to become a significant trend in this country.

The home schooling movement [in South Africa] is also fed by a growing number of parents who perceive public school systems as being hostile to their religious beliefs and traditional morality and who wish their children to be brought up within these traditions. Parental concerns about drugs for instance are particularly under the spotlight at the moment in this country. Parents have a vested interest in their children's education

and given the option will choose schools that are safe, effective and compatible with their values.

Historically home schooling has gone unacknowledged in South African law, and parents who wanted to home school applied for exemption from compulsory school attendance. Exemption was seldom granted and consequently many of the estimated 1300 home schooled South African children are doing so "underground." The draft SA Schools Bill released earlier this year was the first to recognize the value of home education and provide for it. Home Schoolers have taken note of further changes to the home school clause, Section 50 in the amended SA Schools Bill that was released this week, and endorse these as a move in the right direction. However, while Section 50 recognizes home education, the conditions stipulated for registration vest excessive discretionary power in the hands of the Head of Department. Such registrations will rest solely on the discretion of the Head of Department who must satisfy him- or herself that such a registration would be in the interest of the learner and may also set any other conditions that he or she sees fit.

By placing the power to decide the interests of the child in the hands of the Head of Department, the Minister is substituting a bureaucrat's judgment for that of the parents. Not only is this contrary to the generally held assumption that parents will act in their children's best interest and should be allowed to do so, but would also fly in the face of the Department's desire for greater parental involvement in the education of their children.

It is disturbing to note the unreasonable treatment of the home education model by the implied assumption that this parental choice may not be in the interest of the child but that compulsory attendance at public or independent schools automatically would be. This would explain why the Minister does not find it necessary to apply this same condition to registration of the child in every school. Considering the likelihood of exposure to negative influences ranging from violence and gangsterism to drugs, peer pressure and anti-social student behavior, it would be more pertinent to the interests of the child to establish the value of registration in many schools that parents are compelled to send their children to. Furthermore, this treatment of the interests of the child begs the question, does the Minister believe ordinary parents to be incompetent in making decisions regarding the interests of their children and that they should defer to bureaucrats [who are] backed by state power?

Equally unacceptable is the provision which will allow the Head of Department to lay down any other conditions. This would not only apply to reasonable conditions such as those relating to academic assessments, but would also allow the Head of Department to specify conditions that would make home education available in name only – for example, if the Head of Department specified that only parents who are certified teachers be allowed to home school their children. The power to determine conditions of registration should properly rest with the Member of the Executive Council as it does with other schools and not with his or her subordinate.

South Africa has a unique opportunity to create a schooling dispensation which is not only equitable but which is also in tune with international educational developments. ...

Just before this issue of GWS went to press, Kate sent us an update and also gave us some further background about homeschooling in South Africa:

Under our previous government, we had compulsory school attendance laws that applied to all children except Black children. White children especially were herded into schools. It is my personal belief that this was an effective way of perpetuating the myths and fears on which apartheid survived. With the birth of our democracy, elections and a new government, and of course, for the first time, a Bill of Rights, came a whole series of new laws to address the imbalances of the past, and among them new education laws that would attempt to equalize the delivery of education to all children. Black schools were horribly underfunded and in a shocking state, and so it is in this context that new laws are been drafted.

The first policy papers started coming out the first half of last year and since then there have been several. Home schooling got a mention in a document called the Hunter Report. The idea of home schooling as an alternative model in the delivery of education was dismissively trashed. Shortly after that, in response to requests from home schoolers in this country to the U.S. group, the Home School Legal Defense Association, who sent an issues alert to their members, numerous letters from home schooling families in the USA were received by the South African ambassador to the U.S. requesting that home schooling be legalized in this country. At the same time, submissions were been made at every opportunity by organizations in this country and letters from ordinary citizens were been sent to the relevant authorities. It is our belief, though, that it was the

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concern and letters from ordinary American home schooling families who brought about the change in heart in our Department of Education. The next report that came out acknowledged that there were a variety of cir-cumstances in which home schooling might be a reasonable option and promised to examine the relevant laws of other countries in or to determine the most suitable framework for the recognition of home schooling in this country.

The second draft Bill was released mid-August. The second draft was only marginally better than the first. The public hearings on this the second draft of the SA Schools Bill were held in the first week in September and I went down to Cape Town to Parliament representing my province in making a submission to the Parliamentry Committee on Education. We objected to the current home school clause for the reasons I described in my article. We were also able to point out that under the previous government, a home schooling couple had been imprisoned for six months and their children placed in orphanage, for home schooling without permission. We had home schooling families sitting in the public gallery and at the end of our time before the committee I said to the committee, "This SA Schools Bill is about the children." I then pointed to the home schoolers in the public gallery and said "There are the children being taught at home and there are the parents that will sit in jail youdon't amend this Bill." It was admittedly melodramatic but the point really hit home to those on the committee. One of the political parties that two months ago had been very unsympathetic said afterwards they would support us and several Members of Parliament commented that we can't criminalize parents for home schooling.

We will hear the outcome in a few weeks or so. If the home school clause is not amended to a form that will be acceptable to home schoolers, we are going to be heading for a stormy time.

Kate's email address is ogfarms@aztec.co.za. If readers would like to help further, Kate will be able to suggest what would be most useful.

Office News

[SS:] I've just returned from the Ozark Cooperative Warehouse conference in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where it was fun to meet homeschoolers from that part of the country and to explore some of the connections between homeschooling and natural foods/alternative medicine. During the same weekend, Pat and Day Farenga spoke at the Home-Education Conference in Sacramento, one of the largest annual homeschooling conferences. They enjoyed meeting and talking to many subscribers and GWS friends, and welcomed the chance to talk with David and Micki Colfax and two of their sons, Drew and Reed.

Several readers who placed orders for Herbert Kohl's book *The Question is College* were disappointed to learn that our limited stock of this out-of-print book had run out. The good news is that your interest in the book helped me secure its inclusion in the Heinemann-Boynton/Cook Innovators in Education series. *The Question is College* and another book by Herb Kohl, *Reading: How To*, are scheduled for publication in the fall of 1997. (They'll be preceded by James Herndon's wonderful books, which are due to come out in March of 1997.)

Meanwhile, those of you who are still interested in thinking about the college choice may be helped by other resources available here: Pat Farenga's booklet *Teen Homeschoolers: College or Not*, the GWS Issue Packet "Life After Homeschooling" (which includes stories about homeschoolers in college and homeschoolers who chose not to go to college), and our consultation services (ask for our packet of info).

We have several new books available through our catalog this fall, and several new book sets (combinations of related books offered at a discount) with specially written guides to go with them. Current subscribers should have received our 8-page catalog supplement announcing these new offerings. If you didn't receive one and would like to, just ask us to send it.

We apologize for omitting the address of *Pen-Pal Junkies*, described in GWS #112. It's PO Box 2920, Big Bear City CA 92314. Subscriptions are $6/yr, or send a 32¢ stamp for a sample. ◆

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Learning Exchanges

Luz Shosie (CT) writes:

I magine a community where all people are teachers and we are all learning all the time. What if we could all learn and teach what we were interested in, work and play together on projects and ideas we choose and we control? We now spend millions of tax dollars on a school system that is open only some of the time to only a few people to do a very limited variety of activities that are strictly controlled by the government. Why not cultivate a community with real learning for everyone and demonstrate that learning doesn't have to be expensive or cut off from the rest of life?

John Holt advised us to imagine the kind of world we would like to live in and then, as far as we could, start living as if that world existed. A couple of years ago, I joined a learning exchange that was started by Heidi Priesnitz, a homeschooler in Canada. I found a woman in the town next to me who wanted to teach drumming and learn more about gardening, and soon we were meeting and exchanging all kinds of information and skills. It was a great idea, but most of the people listed in Heidi's learning exchange were far away from me. I wished for a more local resource until I figured out I'd better create one. I started by sending a questionnaire to all the families listed on the mailing list of our group, Unschoolers Support. I asked them to list things they'd like to learn, teach, share, or exchange. Now we have Connections, a list of people from all over Connecticut who want to share their knowledge, ideas, goods, services, activities.

A crucial difference between Connections and school is the matter of choice. In Connections, whatever is learned is at the learner's request. It's a voluntary arrangement. We list what is being offered and what is being sought, and then it's up to each person to use our mailing list to contact someone. People then make their own arrangements about time and place to meet, methods to use, compensation, etc. I don't take responsibility for anything beyond listing the names, and I made that clear both because I didn't want to be in an administrative position and because I believe people can be responsible for whatever they choose to do. That means that I can't guarantee that anyone who is offering to teach something will indeed be a good teacher. That's up to the learner to figure out. They might say to the person who is offering flute lessons, "I'd like to try out one lesson and see how it goes." But it's also a mutual arrangement between the teacher and the learner, so the teacher has the ability to say, "This is what I offer: a series of five lessons ..." or whatever it might be. Both parties have the ability to say what they want and what they will give and to make their own structure.

I also don't take responsibilty for the success or failure of the arrangements. If someone called me up and said, "I tried to take lessons from so-and-so, but it didn't work out well," I would respond, "It's up to you to end it if you want to, or to take it as far as you want to." I realize that some people might expect a situation such as what would exist in a school, in which it would be possible to complain to the administration if a teacher wasn't successful. But again, I'm saying that the responsibility for the learning/teaching arrangements rests with the people involved. I'm simply making the information available so that people can find one another.

My husband Ned and I have recently started another learning exchange called Guilford University (Guilford is the name of our town). This one is not limited to the people in our unschooling group; this is open to the wider community. We have published two lists: subjects that people are seeking and subjects requested. In this case, we don't publish the names and phone numbers, because some people might not want that information widely circulated. Instead, when someone finds a subject they are interested in, they call me up and I give them the name, address, or phone number of the person who wants to share that subject.

We have put notices announcing G.U. in our local paper, on local access cable TV, and on the library bulletin board, and have gotten some responses. Our goal with G.U. is primarily to get our ideas out. Ned and I had been doing a lot of letter-writing and making videos to put on the local access station, in which we were criticizing conventional schooling. People would ask, "What's your alternative?", so G.U. is a way of showing one alternative. It's a way of getting people thinking about the idea that there is another way of learning that doesn't depend on school.

Exchanging Writing Help, Farm Work, Biology Lab Visits

Diane Metzler is a homeschooling mother who has used the Connections list to work out several exchanges. We asked her to tell us about them, and she replied:

I had listed myself as offering help with grammar and composition and as seeking opportunities for a biology

class or lab. I felt I was able to give some information to people who wanted to help their children with writing, because people often comment on how well my daughter writes. Even when she tried school for one semester in ninth grade, the English teacher kept asking her how she learned to write so well in homeschooling and what our approach had been. She didn't know how to diagram sentences but she was able to write, and she and the teacher had several discussions about what we did at home and the process we went through in writing. I thought I could offer other parents some ideas about resources we had used and some samples of my children's writing.

When Luz's list was published, another mother called me asking for help with her son's writing. We had actually met a year earlier at an unschoolers' picnic, and our sons, who were both the same age (12), had gotten along really well, but for one reason or another, we hadn't been able to get together. When she called, I mentioned that I was researching different forms of Chinese exercise, and she told me that she was offering a workshop at a center for holistic health the next day. The workshop was in Qigong, a form of exercise, and I remembered that she had listed herself as offering this on Luz's list. I'm taking her class now, and it's great.

Meanwhile, we got together so that I could share with her some resources about writing. I brought a lot of books with me, including a book called *Learning Grammar Through Writing*, by Sandra Bell (avail. from Educators Publishing Service, 75 Moulton St, Cambridge MA 02238), which I have found very helpful. I showed her some of my children's finished writing projects and told her a bit about how they had written them and how I had helped. I was really just trying to give her a starting place, and I think she got some good ideas from our conversation.

Because our boys got along so well, we decided that we could set up another exchange. This family has a farm, and they had listed "Farm Life and Skills" under "Offering" on Luz's list. My son is very interested in this, so twice a month, he'll go over there and help with the animals or with projects like building a chicken coop. Two other times a month, their son will come over to our house and the boys will do science experiments together. I'm enthusiastic about science, and because I edit the state homeschooling newsletter, I get information about all kinds of science resources. We have lots of books about experiments, including *The Flying Circus of Physics* (avail. from John Holt's Bookstore, #1678, $19.95 + $4.50 s/h), which I love.

Last year I was also able to find a wonderful lab opportunity for my daughter. One of the fathers in Luz's unschooling group has his own lab at Yale University, and my daughter was able to work with him several times a month. They did dissections, and she was able to ask him questions when she came across something in her biology textbook that she didn't understand. His focus is studying brain cells, looking for clues to how to cure epilepsy, so they did some work together on culturing brain cells, and he showed her how to keep a lab book and take notes. We had looked at a list of labs that the ninth graders were going to do at the local high school, to see if we should try to do any of the same ones, but most of them were things like using colored paper clips to simulate DNA sequencing. I think that Danielle's experience of seeing how a real scientist worked was much more beneficial to her.

She subsequently changed her own focus to marine biology, and she went to a nearby aquarium with some other homeschooled teenagers. One of the mothers had arranged for a biologist at the aquarium to offer a class for homeschooled teenagers. From there, Danielle went on to volunteer at a local nature center. She went through a training program there in which she learned to give presentations to other school kids. She also kept her own field journal in which she sketched plants and animals.

It seems to me that no matter what we've tried to do, we've always found a way to do it. You just have to keep asking and asking everyone you know. ◆

Here are some of the subjects being offered or being sought on the Connections list. You can see what a wealth of knowledge and interest exists among even a small group of people:

Adventure education
Appalachian trail hiking
Art & architecture
Biology class/lab
Bagpipe music
Banjo lessons
Book discussion
Computer mentorship
Farm life and skills
Food co-op, starting
Garden plants and advice
Genealogy
Grammar and composition
Home-based business experience
Photography advice
Poetry teacher
Reading aloud
Science experiments
Sign language
Spanish study group or tutor
Tai chi
Typing
Video production
Yard work

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When Two Children Have
Different Learning Styles

"People learn in different ways" is a basic premise of homeschooling. As the following stories show, children in the same family can approach the same activity very differently.

She Likes to Watch First, He Jumps Right In

From Karen Mende-Fridkis (NJ):

My daughter Kate is one to stand back and observe what others are involved with before attempting to join in herself. As a new mother, I would often be worried by this behavior. Watching all the other active toddlers jumping into the pool, I would wonder why Kate would stand by my side, making no effort to join their fun. When I enrolled us in a "Mommy and Me" class for toddlers, I would be the one pretending to dance like a butterfly or crawl like a squirrel, while Kate grabbed hold of my leg and tried to keep me near. Later at home she would feel secure enough to experiment with the new type of play that she had observed. In the safety of her own home she would perform her butterfly dance.

This "observe first, try it myself later" method of learning has remained with Kate. At 10, she sometimes plunges into a new activity, but usually she has learned something about it first, either through her observation of someone engaged in the pursuit or through information she has gathered through reading or conversations.

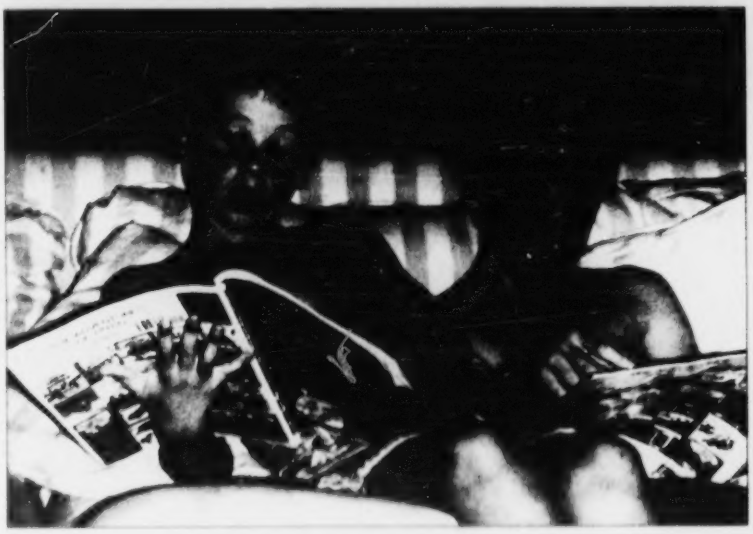
Her younger brother Jacob, on the other hand, dives into the activity as soon as his interest is piqued. This took me by surprise, because I expected that he would be like his sister and greet each new situation with caution. Instead, he never hesitates, and often astounds me with the risks he takes. The phrase "Please think about what you're doing before you do it!" often escapes my lips, much to my chagrin. It is not a message that creates great confidence in a child, but as a mother startled by her child's actions and worried about the consequences, it is the remark that first comes to mind. When Jacob was introduced to the water, he wanted to swim on his own. When he was 3 and we were in the hotel pool on our vacation, he swam out by himself into the deep water. Baby Gabriel was in my arms as Jacob sped away, let go of the edge, and sunk to the bottom. Luckily, I was at his side in a moment and scooped him up to the surface. Behaviors like this are not out of the ordinary for Jake. He's not usually reckless, just eager. He sees what he wants and pursues it without thinking about the results of his actions.

This bold tactic has gained him experiences that a shy child would not acquire. Jacob did not waiver when his uncle asked him to join him at 5:00 in the morning for a day of deep water fishing off his boat. It didn't bother Jacob that he had never before been in a boat for more than an hour or two, never gone fishing in the ocean, knew nothing of what the trip would bring, or that the other man in the boat, besides his uncle, would be a stranger to him. Even when he became seasick, he refused to turn back; he was too eager to try to catch his first shellfish.

Now that I have become a bit more familiar with both children's learning styles, I know not to become frustrated when Kate hesitates to answer a math problem that she is not 100% sure about. There are many times that I think she knows the answer, but she refuses to guess. Jacob, on the other hand, throws out answers gleefully. This morning when I asked him to read a three-digit number, his first reply was incorrect, as was his second, third, and fourth. Finally, after I explained how to read numbers in the hundreds, he understood the concept and correctly answered the next five questions. Having to muddle through a series of wrong responses didn't leave him angered, frustrated, and ready to call it quits. He plowed on, oblivious to any sensation that this process was in some way a hindrance to arriving at the correct answer.

But for Kate, incorrect answers to math problems are another story. Should she fail to respond correctly the first time, she is frequently unwilling to attempt another try. If she does and is wrong this time too, her spirits plummet and she feels a deep sense of failure. For example, two weeks ago when we were working together from a new math book, one of the questions was to find the solution to 5 x 11. It had been a while since Kate had solved any multiplication problems, and she didn't know the answer immediately. I could see, by the tension in her body, that she was upset, and I asked her if she remembered how to figure out the 11 times table. She didn't, and this frustrated her further. My next step was to draw a chart of people, each receiving piles of apples. With this explanation, she quickly saw the correct answer. If this hadn't worked, I could see that she was nearing her turn-off point, the place where she gives up and cries in frustration. Thus with her there is continuous effort to build up her math confidence enough so that she is willing to take a risk. Without that belief in herself, she shuts up and groans in despair about not understanding anything.

Before I was a mother, I would have thought that pushing yourself to perfection was something that came from parents. Now I know that this type of pressure can also be generated within. Kate is thriving because she is able to work at her own pace without the constant awareness of how other children around her are faring. For now at least, she needs to get perfect papers on every math assignment to bolster her courage to continue. Homeschooling has enabled me to tailor how each of our children is presented with challenges so that they will be motivated to work up to their abilities and not become frustrated and turned off instead.



Taylor (left) and Christopher reading together – in different ways

One Sounds Out Words, the Other Recognizes Them

From Andy Migner (MA):

My sons Christopher (9) and Taylor (6) have both recently learned to read. Frequently they are reading the same book (often simultaneously while sitting next to each other), and their different styles of learning are readily apparent. Over time, I have come to see that my children's learning styles are not separate aspects of their personalities but intrinsic, if not central, to who they are.

Sounding out words phonetically comes naturally to Taylor and he loves the feel of words as they roll off his tongue. He has always enjoyed listening to music and singing, so songs and songbooks were actually his first reading material. Dr. Seuss books, with all their made-up multi-syllable words and rhythm and rhyme, were naturally the next books he enjoyed reading to himself. He is easygoing by nature and not one to readily ask for help. So when he comes to a word that he is unable to sound out, he simply skips over it. What he is able to read satisfies him, and he gains a tremendous sense of accomplishment from being able to complete fairly lengthy material.

Christopher, his older brother, soaks up the whole picture, whether it is a social situation or in reading. He has learned to read by recognizing the whole word. Also, unlike Taylor, Christopher finds it tremendously important to understand everything he reads. Therefore, he asks a lot of questions along the way about illustrations, characters, word definitions, historical context, motivation, etc. When he doesn't recognize a word, he will look to the picture for clues. Then, while looking at the picture, he may become interested in the artist's work or in subtle details that he hadn't noticed before. These might trigger a whole other thought or conversation and when he returns to the printed page, he may need to start over to find where he left off. Reading, for him, has therefore been hard work and at times frustrating. But when he finishes a book, he has soaked up a tremendously rich experience.

Taylor's learning style requires very little investment from me and it provides a high rate of return (the satisfaction of observing his pleasure and sense of accomplishment). I can understand why his style is the preferred learning style in schools. Christopher's style, on the other hand, requires a great deal of involvement, conversation, attention, and encouragement from me, and the return is less immediately evident. But when I take the time to reflect, I realize that by needing me to be so actively involved in the process, Christopher has given me the gift of his "tremendously rich experience."

When the boys are sitting next to each other reading the same book, Taylor is often able to sound out a word that Christopher doesn't know, and Christopher often recognizes a word that Taylor is struggling to sound out. Together they are able to read more words than they would be able to read separately. Along the way, Christopher benefits from Taylor's knowledge of phonics (as well as his good humor and love of language), and Taylor gets the gift of Christopher's rich experience by seeing a book through Christopher's eyes. So their learning styles complement one another and together they learn and accomplish more.

Taylor's learning style is straightforward and earns him immediate success and a sense of accomplishment. With Christopher, though, I have at times been concerned about how his learning style and way of perceiving the world would serve him later in life. All the talk about Attention Deficit Disorder, his being an older reader, and his own frustration (or is it mine?) has made it not always easy to see the strengths and potential in his style. Recently, however, my sister-in-law told me the details of her most recent birth experience, central to which was the doctor, who without a doubt is a "whole picture" kind of fellow. The baby was transverse and labor was prolonged by the baby's head becoming engaged but then disengaging because the body would not follow. So at the tail end of labor,

the doctor was manually guiding the baby in the right direction, encouraging my sister-in-law, educating my brother-in-law, and noticing all of the other pertinent details (that everyone else present had missed), such as that the curtain needed to be more completely closed and the automatic blood pressure cup had failed to deflate. His *talent* for being able to perceive all the details simultaneously was largely responsible for his skillful work. That story has renewed my faith that my boys' learning styles are perfectly matched to who they were created to be and to become.

Good with Words, Good with Hands-On Projects

From Susan Nichols of Michigan:

Stuart, our 5-year-old, is a proficient and prolific reader. Much of his new vocabulary comes from this reading. When listening to something read aloud, he will frequently repeat something or ask a question to clarify new knowledge. By reprocessing the information he receives, he makes it his own and can reuse it appropriately in different situations. His speech and play is interspersed with phrases such as "he turned pale with fright," "it plummeted to the ground," "here today, gone tomorrow" (we were treated to a thorough explanation of this gem, just in case we didn't understand its meaning!), "tremendously," "in comparison," "caution," and, a real favorite, "rapidly."

Stuart's excellent memory and vocabulary allow him to learn by verbally relating new knowledge to old. We've been studying the Tudor period in history (we're English), and Stuart was able to remember all sorts of events and point out connections between them. We hadn't said anything to prompt the connections; he made them by himself.

From the point of view of vocabulary development, then, Stuart's learning style gives him several advantages. First, because he internalizes the vocabulary and relates it to previous knowledge, he remembers it and can use it freely in new situations. This is aided by homeschooling, as the people around him (adults) understand the words in a way that a class of others his age might not. Second, the vocabulary he wants to use for the things he wants to say is readily available in books, on nature videos he watches, and from the adults around him, so it's easy for him to acquire. Third, since he hears or reads new words over and over, and since he is good at relating one situation or event to another, it's easy for him to extrapolate the meaning of new words for himself.

Now on to James, our 7-year-old. A more contrary approach would be hard to find! James likes to read and be read to, but while his brother listens intently to every word, James lets the words wash over him like a wave. Sometimes he will remember a new word, but he may be unable to use it appropriately himself, or he may transform it, creatively, into an unconventional form. At breakfast this morning, he said, "I think I'll bother with this chair," and he meant that he would use it! Another example was when James said that grass was "fertilized" in a cow's stomach to produce milk. When I questioned him further, I learned that he understood that we put fertilizer on plants to make them grow better. Thus, *his* logic led him to apply this to the grass-cow-milk situation.

Although James's strengths lie in his imagination and creativity, when it comes to vocabulary development, they do cause problems. His imagination enables him to conceive countless possibilities from a single fact or situation. They are not necessary technically feasible or desirable (could this be the beginning of invention or design capabilities?), but nevertheless, he can explain in great detail the numerous "could bes" he has devised. But it can be frustrating for him that his relatively restricted vocabulary (compared to Stuart's) sometimes makes it hard for him to explain his ideas clearly. He wants to be precise in his speech, but he as yet lacks the necessary vocabulary to achieve this. For example, James was helping his dad to mow the grass. James wanted to engineer a way to get the grass to actually blow up into the trailer. He had a good idea, even though it was impractical in this case because he wasn't familiar enough with the mechanisms and materials involved. But his explanation was hampered by his repetitive use of the word "something" – he had an idea but didn't have the words to explain it fully.

Another example: he has created a whole sound system, drum kit, and microphone from junk, simply from watching music videos and from seeing the items in the music store. He is fascinated with sound equipment. However, he is more interested in its creation than in its accurate description, so he initially referred to it as "things" and "knobs" and so on.

To summarize, James's vocabulary development, as a result of his more hands-on approach to learning, is slower. Also, whereas, as I said earlier, the vocabulary that Stuart wants to use is more readily available all around him, there isn't as much specialist technical vocabulary in everyday conversation or in novels, so James doesn't have as many opportunities to hear the words he wants to use. Even when he does have the opportunity, he's not always able to memorize it easily.

Thus, from a traditional school perspective of learning, it is obvious that Stuart's learning style would be the one most valued. In other learning situations, however, it is James's creativity that is indispensible. When creating the above-mentioned sound system, it was James who could better visualize which box or tube was most suitable. When crafting, it is James who comes up with the wonderful ideas, and Stuart who is content to follow his brother's leading, adding his own input less frequently. With regard to music in general, James's learning style enables him to improvise and compose with relatively little effort. And when problem-solving, James is able to brainstorm ideas with ease.

So, although in terms of vocabulary development Stuart's style is stronger, this does not mean that it is always the better style. We have to remember that each child has his own strengths and weaknesses and that in different activities, each will shine in his own special way.

One Wants More Involvement from Mom

From Gail Sichel (NY):

It is difficult for me to know how much of the differences my two children have in approaching learning come from some of the unconscious or less conscious processes that go on between us. Sometimes it has seemed that my older daughter has needed my explanations and physical presence more, but as I look back on it, perhaps this is because she was started on a project before she was really ready. For example, she was riding a two-wheeler with training wheels for at least two years. When she tried riding without the training wheels, she needed me to run behind her a lot. When I wasn't behind her, she seemed to appreciate detailed explanations of what to expect.

My younger daughter, on the other hand, spent much less time with training wheels, and when I felt it was time to get rid of them and suggested the possibility to her, she was willing to try, and in a short time she got the hang of it. Who knows – maybe watching and listening to my instructions to the older one influenced her. Or perhaps, and this is probably more likely, my older daughter needs to have me there. She likes to have my involvement every step of the way. Recently, we were putting the girls' homeschooling portfolios together. I realized that the older one, liking my involvement every step of the way, is much more involved in the *process* of learning and doing. The younger one focuses on the goal and goes for it regardless of my presence.

When it comes to reading, one child never got the hang of phonics. She still can't tell you the sounds an "e," for example, can make, but she is an avid reader and her spelling has been improving over time and with lots of practice reading. The other child has an ear for phonics, can spell fairly well, and yet is not reading much yet. Her interest has not yet been sparked. We are sure it will happen some time.

Another interesting point is that I have always learned more easily and thoroughly when someone walks me through the subject in the beginning (and to me, a video is not a substitute for a person). My husband, on the other hand, would prefer to read many books on the topic. I think I enjoy the exchange and am fed in other ways too when there is another person to share the experience with me. At times I've wished that I could just give books to the kids so they could learn whatever it was and I would do my own thing. Then I remember that the kids want more than the information, too: they want the exchange, the fun, the conversation, and the tangents, and so the project that I had in mind for myself gets done at another time. For years I thought there was something wrong with me that I didn't learn as easily on my own. I am so grateful, now, for my own experience, so that the kids can grow up feeling OK about their learning process, can get the information they need or want, and can have fun too. ◆

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Mother Wins Right to Homeschool

Lynette Tarkington of Massachusetts, the mother who wrote "Homeschooling Disputed in Divorce" in GWS #110, now writes:

When I wrote last, my ex-husband was insisting that my two children, aged 10 and 7, and whom I have homeschooled since birth, go to school. Since I would not agree to this, he took me to court. One month before the court date, I had to find a new lawyer, as the one I had had until then told me she was sure we could not win this and she did not want to continue with the case.

I followed up on the recommendation of a friend and met with a new lawyer. After a long consultation, she agreed to take on my case but told me that it would be a test case and very difficult to win. Meanwhile, we had a court appointed guardian ad litem [someone who is assigned to determine the best interests of the child or to represent the child] who was prejudiced against homeschooling. He refused to talk to any of my homeschooling references as he felt homeschoolers "tend to protect each other and therefore are not objective." He visited our home on two occasions and met with my children alone for only five minutes each. It was his job to make a recommendation to the court about their schooling. I was not optimistic. To add to the things going against me, my 10-year-old son is a late reader and was put through extensive testing by his father last winter which showed his reading level to be at second grade. While this is not a concern to me, it was to the school department that tested him and to his father and the guardian ad litem – all very weighty forces to have against me.

My lawyer was wonderful. She spent hours talking to people about homeschooling and reading books and related materials until she understood homeschooling and could put herself solidly behind it. She asked me a lot of questions and involved me in the process of developing a strategy to oppose the motion that the children be enrolled in school for the '96-'97 year. She came up with a brilliant document, supplemented by materials from me, which we presented as an opposition to the motion the day before the hearing (this didn't give the other side time to prepare a response to it). The document consisted of three sections:

1. A procedural background which briefly described our case since we have been in litigation.

2. The argument that it is in the children's best interests to homeschool. This included information on their curriculum, their progress, and their social life.

3. A description of why it is a constitutionally protected right of every parent to homeschool her or his children.

The document also contained a list of exhibits which included my resumé, both children's curriculum outlines for the coming year, a letter from the Clonlara Home Based Education program (where they are enrolled), the children's end-of-year reports, test results to show that my son had made progress in his reading and writing, some letters of reference from people who know my children as learners, and some photographs of the children in learning situations. It was an impressive document.

However, when the guardian ad litem finally presented his report the night before the hearing, he recommended that the children be enrolled in school. My lawyer was convinced that we would not be able to win because the judge assigned to our case had not been known to rule against a guardian's recommendation. During the hearing, I spoke and pleaded for the stability of my children's lives and described their homeschooling community and involvements in some detail. The judge asked what my qualifications were; fortunately I have over twenty years of experience as an educator in many different settings. Much as I hate it, how we look on paper makes a difference when we are up against the system.

Two days after the hearing, I left for a three-week vacation in England (for which I'd had to go to the court to get permission). I left convinced that on my return I would have to prepare my children for school as well as re-orient my own life. Two days after I arrived in England, my lawyer called me with the news that we had won the case. At least for the coming year, we would be able to homeschool. Never had I felt so much relief as I did in those moments and days following that news. It was as if a boulder had been lifted from my shoulders. My children are also very much relieved and more than ever committed to homeschooling. Although this issue is likely to come up again next year, a small piece of my faith in the justice system has been restored.

Many people have helped me win this case. If it hadn't been for their support and encouragement, I would not have been able to do it. My homeschooling community and a few friends spent hours listening to me cry, rage, and struggle to figure out what to do and how to do it. People wrote letters about my children that I will treasure for the rest of my life. Other people lent me books and references to boost my case and gave me the names of other people to talk to. I talked with people I have never met all over the country who gave me their support. I will always be grateful to you all. The other thing that made a difference was prayer. Many people were praying for me that day. Thank you.

Explaining Homeschooling

Elisa Wood wrote in the Fall 1996 issue of the Massachusetts Home Learning Association newsletter:

New to homeschooling, I soaked up as many facts and figures proving its worth as I could. I thought if I marshaled a strong argument, no one could dispute my choice. When questioned by relatives, supermarket clerks, neighbors, librarians, waitresses, or telephone salespeople, I unleashed my knowledge, like half a dozen overly affectionate St. Bernards, which I thought would knock skeptics off their feet.

I was always surprised to find them still standing. Why weren't they running out to buy John Holt's complete collection? Hadn't they heard what I'd said about homeschoolers at Harvard? Didn't they listen when I debunked the socialization myth? Why weren't they awestruck by the fact that Thomas Edison was homeschooled?

Eventually, I figured out that talking about homeschooling holds certain parallels to looking for employment. Researchers say that a job applicant who asks questions and listens during an interview is more apt to get the job than one who dominates the conversation with a personal sales pitch.

Now I try to listen more and talk less. I often respond to the question with questions: "My daughter is homeschooled. Does your daughter go to school? ... Oh, how does she like it? ... She doesn't?" Instead of edging away from me in the supermarket line, the Mom then follows me out the door. I politely answer her questions, but keep my St. Bernards chained. She wants to know if homeschooling is legal. She wants to know why I decided to do it. She wants to know where she can find out more.

By stopping to listen, I discovered that not everyone means the same thing by the question, "Why isn't your daughter in school?" Not all are against homeschooling. The store clerk, in fact, wants to tell me that her seven grandchildren are homeschooled too. The librarian is only wondering if it is a school holiday and she is about to be barraged by a roomful of children. The neighbor has already heard about homeschooling and likes the idea; she just wants to know if she needs a degree to homeschool her children. ...

Children and Chores

From Julie Scandora (WA):

I read with interest the ideas in GWS #110 about children doing chores, since this is an area which is still evolving for us. My ideal was for the children to notice work that needed to be done and just do it. Funny, no one else ever noticed the toilets. Also, some noticed some jobs sometimes, but others never did. Then I tried assigning tasks, but ended up nagging.

Our latest idea is a compromise of the two extremes. Each child is responsible for a certain number of tasks a week. The number increases with age. The tasks that need doing are posted, but the children are also free to come up with their own.

With this method, the children tend to do the same jobs each week but feel greater responsibility for them than when I had assigned jobs, so there is no nagging on my part. Also, they often do more jobs than the number we had set. I think this is partly because many jobs are seen as fun (shoveling the sidewalk, since it is so rarely needed, or mowing the lawn by the 8-year-old since he feels so grown up doing it) and partly because the children, feeling responsible for their jobs, will do them when needed. So if, for instance, company is coming, a child will vacuum the rug even if it has already been done for the week.

So the children *do* notice what needs to be done. Perhaps before it was just too much to ask that they be aware of everything that could possibly be done and constantly check to see if it needed doing. But most definitely one reason that they do work so willingly is due to how much I pay them – nothing. I never have and I think Alfie Kohn, in *Punished by Rewards*, speaks well to this.

Finally, Gail Sichel, who wrote about household chores in GWS #110, might consider breaking some tasks into smaller components so all can participate. For instance, when we vacuum, furniture and other items must be moved out of the way. Then the carpet is vacuumed, then the items are put back. That breaks the whole task of vacuuming into two or three

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parts which can be done by different children if necessary.

More on Negative Effects of Math Test

Lyn Milum (FL) writes:

In GWS #111, Herb Hough wrote about real-life math and commented on my daughter Arwen's having been intimidated by math testing (which I had described in GWS #109). He felt that our problems were due to being in a graded environment and that parents shouldn't pose problems to their children but should allow them to formulate their own.

I fully agree that graded environments, dividing children by their ages, standardized tests, and math programs are unlike real, adult life – that is, life after high school or college. But most colleges do require math skills for acceptance. Herb felt that part of our problem is our method of testing, and that it would be more like real life if done in days rather than hours. I agree philosophically, but in the practical world, tests are administered in a certain way. It seems unfair not to let kids know what GED or college entrance testing is like just because we think it isn't done well or because in a more advanced society we wouldn't have testing at all.

Our family is enrolled in a private school through which we homeschool. Necessarily, the children are placed in grade levels. This classification does not seem to be damaging to them in any way. Arwen wanted to test herself, and it seemed logical to choose the test level closest to her age and grade. She wanted to be familiar with testing and to see if she had a level of knowledge similar to her peers since she doesn't do the same coursework. Her test results were extremely high on language arts, average on social studies and science, and just below average in math. Overall, these scores helped her to feel much more relaxed about what she has been doing with her life and how it will affect the option of college. The scores also caused her to want to find more interesting math programs so that her study of math would be more meaningful to her.

Arwen is interested in going to college, even if not necessarily to earn a degree. She wants to challenge herself and to pursue writing and art in the company of others. She knows there are other ways to do this, but she is interested in this one. In order to support her goal of attending college, I want to provide materials she can use to prepare herself, and math is the only area in which she feels somewhat unprepared. She doesn't want to go into a field that requires lots of technical mathematics, but she also doesn't want college's required math courses to be so unfamiliar and challenging for her that she is less able to focus on her other courses.

I feel that it is important for a child not to be restricted because of a lack of skill in any area. My goal is to present these ideas in natural, practical, interesting, and engaging ways. This is much easier to do in the younger years than in the late teens. We saw a college telecourse on algebra that had very interesting real problems, such as figuring out how many planes, with their fuel restrictions, could carry adequate supplies to people who were trapped behind the German lines in World War II. The instructor showed us how algebra was necessary for solving this problem and demonstrated how it worked. Our fundamental understanding of algebra was insufficient for us to follow him, however. I'd like to see a similar course for beginning algebra.

Herb refers to the learning mode, SYMNI (Someday You Might Need It). I agree that this kind of learning can be coercive and contrived and is usually ill-timed to the person's current level of interest or skill. But there are some things that it is better to be prepared for than to go into without any preparation at all. How about first aid, car repair, fire safety, and dealing with strangers? WINWINI (What I Need When I Need It) is not always practical either. If I move to the wilderness with no doctors nearby, and I wait until I am bitten by a snake before I read about how to treat a bite and where to buy a snakebite kit, my learning mode has not served me well. Less drastically, if I have no interest in math, but am motivated to study healing and choose to go to medical school, I would probably appreciate knowing in advance that I will need lots of math, and I would benefit from advice on how to develop a good foundation in math with interesting materials. If I wait until I'm studying for my SAT, a lack of basic math skills would probably slow me down considerably.

How bad would it be to slow down at that point? Or, how much of my energy would have to be spent earlier to prevent this presumed delay? I don't know. My opinion is that children benefit from understanding society's requirements, the requirements of the college track, and the variety of life choices of which we are aware. Once they know the lay of the land, I hope they go out and change a few rules! In the meanwhile, basic math is necessary for college admission and for much work, and my children are interested in learning it, so I want to provide opportunities, games, and materials that make sense and that are interesting and realistic. I am not trying to "give them problems to solve," but rather to act responsibly in responding to them and in helping them to understand the world as it is.

More on Homeschoolers as Teachers

Marion Cohen (PA) writes:

I was interested in your sections in GWS #110 and #111, "Homeschoolers as Teachers." I'm on the part-time math faculty at Temple University; I've taught mostly first-year Calculus and a little of what Temple calls "Elements of Math Thought." My two younger children unschool, and we are about as unstructured as it is possible to be. I've always felt that my belief and experience in homeschooling has found its way into my classroom teaching. Perhaps I should feel uncomfortable teaching a classroom of students, most of whom are taking the course only to fulfill the math requirement, but I don't. Perhaps it's that I love my subject and find it challenging and rewarding to perfect my lecture notes and teaching style, making calculus more and more clear and at least getting some of the students to stop hating or fearing math.

I've found ways to deal quite effectively and painlessly with certain teaching-related problems that occur. One is the problem of textbooks. In general, I don't like textbooks and would rather not use them. I usually tell the class on the first day that although I try to teach in such a way that if they can't or won't come to class they can rely solely on the text (any text), I also try to teach in such a way that they can rely solely on the lectures, or on the lectures plus any other text besides the usual one. In other words, I treat textbooks as supplementary reading, and I treat lectures as supplementary to the text.

Another problem is students who don't show up for class. My goal isn't to convert students to math, so I don't get huffy, or feel hurt, if students don't show for half of my classes, or if they appear on test days and no others. Even if they don't bring doctor's or lawyer's notes, but merely tell of family mishaps and, sometimes, misfortunes, I always give them the benefit of the doubt. I know I cannot make them change their patterns of attendance – perhaps it's not advisable anyway – and I know it's pragmatic just to let them take their chances. Usually they wind up doing perfectly respectfully in the course. I also know (and I let them know that I know) that students have lives beyond my course.

I am willing to work with students who have missed one or many lectures. For purely selfish reasons, however, I am not willing to give separate individual lectures or tutoring sessions which are as long as the lecture they missed. But I have never needed to. A few minutes after class or during the ten-minute break in the middle of class or extra attention during seatwork time is all that has ever been necessary to help a student catch up.

Another teaching problem is the problem of homework. Students are used to it; departments expect it; it's often on the syllabus. Many students feel nervous or uncomfortable if they don't get assigned it. I'm very much against homework; I believe that it reinforces mistakes and deprives students of what I call "overnight and weekends" – that is, gestation periods, periods of subconscious learning. Homework also makes students anxious, and it almost necessitates a negative association with the material.

I give "optional homework." For those students who seem to feel nervous without it, I give strong suggestions on an individual basis: "I strongly suggest you work tonight on problems #7 and #8. That way you can practice what you just learned so well." Or I make up homework problems as I go along, sometimes according to our class jokes. Or the students make up homework problems. In general, I give as little homework as possible, and in lieu of it I give in-class seatwork (also optional). I try to teach in such a way that students who haven't done the homework will understand anyway, and I even allow and encourage students who haven't done the homework to try a problem on the board anyway. Students have come up to the board and tried problems impromptu and often succeeded.

In general, homeschooling, and the questioning everything that for me goes along with homeschooling, has enhanced my college teaching. And vice-versa. ◆

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Focus

Why Fathers May Resist Homeschooling

Manfred Smith wrote in a recent issue of the Maryland Home Education Association newsletter:

It is not unusual for men to view homeschooling in a negative light. In a strange way, school can become almost a perverse rite of passage for men, something that they had managed to do *in spite* of all the obstacles thrown in their path as opposed to *because* of the obstacles. This experience leaves one feeling battered instead of empowered as would be the case with a traditional rite of passage. A true rite of passage is a voluntary activity, clearly defined, and structured in such a manner that the participant may pass the test and enter into the culture as an adult member. There might be times of fear and doubt, but the youth is clear in his knowledge that with persistence, creativity, and spiritual awareness he will pass from childhood to manhood. Our culture does not have rites of passage. The closest we get to this concept is graduating from twelve or more years of schooling. The pain of separating and psychological suffering experienced by many children as they pass through this process feels much more like a jail sentence than a rite of passage, but time erases the years of numbness and we remember only that we were tough enough and made it through. For men this has become a rite of passage, and is sometimes expressed in the view that "I made it through okay and so can you." Fortunately what usually happens when fathers consider homeschooling is that they read about it, talk about it with other homeschooling dads, and become more comfortable with the concept. An increasing number of fathers see the positive results of homeschooling as they go to conferences or get to know homeschooling families and are excited about teaching their own.

Not all fathers resist homeschooling, by any means. Plenty of fathers are fully supportive and a fair number were the member of the family who initiated the idea. Nevertheless, Manfred's idea struck us as worth exploring further. We decided to invite other fathers to reflect on Manfred's ideas, so we asked: Do Manfred's comments ring true for you, or not, and in what ways? How does your own experience of school affect the way you view your children's homeschooling?

Below are two responses. As always, we welcome others for future issues of GWS.

Worrying About Child's Performance

We asked Ken Lipman-Stern (NJ) to respond to Manfred because he had written, back in GWS #90, about having doubts about homeschooling and wondering whether such an unconventional path would serve his children well. Ken writes:

The man that Manfred describes is very concerned about performance, and I think that does have some validity for men in our culture. Because of that, homeschooling might be threatening to fathers because we're not sure how our children will perform out in the world, and we're not sure how our kids are doing in comparison to other kids. There's no certainty about homeschooling; we're having to put faith in the child's experience.

I don't struggle with this as much now, but when we were first homeschooling, I did struggle with the dichotomy between outward performance and the more subtle flowering of each child. When I think of that, I can understand what Manfred is saying. I went to a meeting, once, of school administrators, and although I was there in a different capacity – not as a homeschooling parent – I kept my ears open. One administrator said that if a child doesn't have basic reading skills by second grade, major red flags will go up within the school system. Well, at that time, my son was about two years older than second grade and he didn't want to read yet. Part of me kept using GWS, the concept of the child's own timetable, and research on child development to reassure myself, but another part was worried about it. It was a tremendous conflict for me, and although I know that conflict transcends gender lines and that plenty of mothers write to GWS to say they have similar worries, in our case, the situation was harder on me than on my wife. She felt that our son's reading would come in time.

I never identified with the notion of school as a rite of passage through toughness, though, because I'm not the

stereotypical male who sees himself as tough. I spent my high school years in the music room playing in jazz bands and orchestras, and school was generally a positive experience for me. The only negative part of it was that I wasn't into sports, and at that time sports were so essential to the character of a male that I grew up with feelings of inadequacy in that area. But I had always been put off by the competition and all the arguing over plays and scores; that never appealed to me.

When it came to my own sons and sports, I very consciously didn't want to tip the scales for them in either direction. I didn't want them to feel that they had to play, but I didn't want them to shy away from sports just because I had done that. Now, our 7-year-old has gone out for the town baseball team, and I find that I actually enjoy the ritual aspects of the sports program, the feeling of the men teaching the boys. But my feeling was not that I needed to push my son into sports because I wanted him to have a different experience from mine. It was simply that I wanted to open the door to all the experiences that were available to him.

Homeschooling, for me, is an experiment. It's an experiment that plays with the concept of child-led learning, which I know doesn't exist in school. It also challenges the concept of intellectual competition. I'm very concerned about the impact of that competition on children. When I was in school, up until junior high, they had three groups in each class. They were called names like the silver group, the gold group, or the diamond group, but we all knew it meant the smart, the middle, and the dumb. I was in the middle, so I always felt pretty comfortable with myself, but I knew that the smart kids had that sense of certainty and the ones at the bottom felt terrible about themselves. As a psychotherapist, I have often worked with adults who had been in the "dumb group" in school and I see how horribly it affected their self-esteem and how the effect lasted throughout their lives. So that was something I didn't want for my own sons.

Another thing I feel we're challenging, through homeschooling, is the vast effect that the consumer marketplace has on kids. I've worked with so many 10-year-olds who would tell me, with shame, that they didn't have the best sneakers because they were a little bit poorer than their neighbor. They told me about the teasing they received from classmates at school. It seems to me that school is really an extension of the marketplace on so many levels. I'm glad that our kids are able to examine the commercials and to understand the hype. On the other hand, they are not immune to the pressures of the marketplace. We live in an apartment complex, so although we have a very strong homeschooling community in our town and our children have friends whose values are much like ours, the kids who are within a stone's throw, the ones who are right here in the apartment complex, watch TV, eat junk food, and go to school. We've had to walk a very narrow line, because we don't want to create enticements by having these things be taboo. Instead, we've tried to create a synthesis of our values and the mainstream values, and to allow our kids to explore.

As a result of being friends with these neighbor kids, and because he wants to be "in the group," my older son now wants to try school, and he wants to go into fifth grade because that's the grade appropriate for his age. In preparation, he's really been hitting the books, working on reading, on math, on cursive. Ironically, this has been the impetus for him to learn some of the things that I had been worrying about. I don't try to talk him out of going to school, but I don't hold back from saying that I'll miss doing a certain thing together when he's in school. For example, we went fossil hunting with another homeschooler in the middle of the day, and I told him I'd miss doing that with him, but on the other hand, I'll probably still do it with our younger son, and I'll do it for myself, because homeschooling is my experience, too.

A man's ambivalence about homeschooling may be rooted in an uncertainty about whether or not the homeschooling experience can insure a child's successful performance in the world.

Coming back to Manfred's comments, I ran a men's group for three years – it was a therapy and support group – and I've seen that the toughness of some men is really a wall or a defense system. The man who says, "My child should have to go through the same tough experiences that I did, because those bad experiences build character," is, I think, holding onto the exterior wall of toughness without examining the pain he felt at going through experiences that were unwanted and harmful. I've seen in some homeschooling families that the man is going along with the idea of homeschooling, while the woman is the one who has the definitive stance about it. It seems to me that in those situations, the man would benefit from exploring his ambivalence about homeschooling and thinking about where it comes from. It may be rooted in an uncertainty about whether or not the homeschooling experience can insure a child's successful performance in the world. This orientation toward "performance in the world" as opposed to "relationship in the world" may be the legacy inherited from our male ancestors, for whom toughness and performance were needed for survival.

I got converted to the homeschooling idea by being actively involved with my kids. Maybe if I were gone all day and only came home at night and my wife had to tell me what the kids had been doing all day, I'd say, "What about math?" or something like that. But because my wife and I decided a long time ago that we would both be part-time workers, and that we would accept a lower standard of living in exchange, I've been with my kids during the day. I've seen the things that happen, unplanned, and I've seen the incredible discussions we get into. I've seen how important the simple things can be. Just this morning, my

older son Sam and I were feeding our pet toads. Sam decided to put the ants into little containers and then to put the containers in the terrarium. The toads hopped into the containers, ate the ants, and then hopped out, and then Sam repeated the process with another bunch of ants. He was so excited that he had invented a little feeding device. Being with kids demands that you have a different interpretation of learning, because it would be easy to say, of that experience, "Yes, but what did he learn?" One of our best friends in the neighborhood is a 13-year-old boy who is a big proponent of school. When he heard about the toad-feeding, his response was, "But how is that going to help Sam get a good job?" So for all of us, child-led learning requires that we interpret things differently. My interpretation now is: when my children are engaged in wonder, during that time, there's learning going on. Learning as engagement is very different from learning as performance.

Alternative Rites of Passage

We asked Joe Kelly to respond to Manfred's thoughts because his work publishing New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams *puts him in touch with many other parents who are thinking about similar questions (including the question of how rites of passage can mark a young person's coming of age). Joe writes:*

I think Manfred is right that our culture doesn't provide much else, other than school, that acts as a rite of passage – especially for boys. This summer, I went to the annual conference of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism, and many people there talked about Western Civilization's lack of initiation ceremonies or rites of passage. For some people who are trying to address that lack, particularly in the so-called men's movement, the solution seems to be to appropriate elements of other cultures' ceremonies, without fully understanding those cultures. I find such cultural appropriation disturbing, but I do think there is a need to find ways – and ways other than school – to mark the passage from childhood to adulthood.

At *New Moon*, we have heard from several families who created ceremonies for their daughter's first menstruation. Sometimes the idea was initiated by an adult (the mother or an aunt or neighbor), but a surprising amount of the time, the request has come from the child. However, in most families, the daughters and adults prefer to be more private about menarche and don't want any kind of ritual. This was true for our daughters.

The fact that only a few girls seem to initiate a menarche ceremony may seem to indicate a lack of interest. But my sense is that many (if not most) young people unconsciously crave some sort of ritual, ceremony, or occasion which acknowledges their passage from childhood. It's just that there is so little cultural permission to stage such rituals. The religious sacraments of passage, like Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation, often lack the depth and relevance they once had in young people's lives. Those few girls who stage their own rites are fully conscious of their desire for a ceremony – and willing to resist social pressure and embarrassment to have it.

Yet I think that many events other than menarche can (sometimes only in hindsight) serve as rites of passage. Just as it takes a familial attitude shift to make the switch from formal school to homeschool, I think it takes an attitude shift to see things that "just happen" to our kids as episodes which are indeed rites of passage. It may be especially important to have this attitude with our sons, who don't have an obvious event, as girls have their first menstruation, to pinpoint a moment of adulthood.

A perfect example of an event which felt like a rite of passage to me was our twin daughters' trip to China. In 1995, when Nia and Mavis were 15, they and my wife went with other girls and women for three weeks to the U.N. Conference on Women in Beijing. I'll never forget the experience I had when I went to meet them on their return. There was a great deal of publicity surrounding the trip, so there were many television cameras, microphones, reporters and family members crowding around the airport arrival gate. My daughters were the first to come off the plane. Amid all the distraction, I was stunned by what I saw. It looked to me as if my daughters had grown about a foot in height. My mind said, "Impossible, they've only been gone three weeks!" But my gut said, "Look at how vast their growth has been!"

As I look back now and analyze it, I was reacting to a strong sense that they had matured during the trip and were returning significantly older. Something about the way they carried themselves, and a look in their eyes – even though they were exhausted from the long intercontinental flight – showed me that they had matured in a palpable way.

Now, it's important to stress that we didn't arrange this trip as a ceremony to introduce our children to adulthood. It was an opportunity that came up for us, and obviously not every family will have children going off to international conferences. But my point is that there are all sorts of events, including much more ordinary ones, that are significant bridges between childhood and adulthood. If we can see these episodes as such bridges, we can honor and remember them for their impact – even if there is no formal ritual attached.

Regarding Manfred's thoughts about the experience of school, I too felt battered rather than empowered in school much of the time. I was a social outsider in elementary school, and struggled academically, too. But my reflections on Manfred's thoughts brought me to the rite of passage at the beginning of elementary school rather than to the high school graduation to which Manfred refers.

It seems to me, at least from my own experience, that the most significant rite of passage a boy experiences in school comes at kindergarten or first grade. In entering that world of the classroom and recess, I learned (I would argue, was indoctrinated with) much of what is socially acceptable behavior for a male – even when those lessons were in direct contrast to what I learned at home. My

father was physically affectionate with me, for example, but I learned that this was not acceptable in school. Affectionately touching another boy induced cries of "Sissy" or "Girl" from peers and disapproving stares from teachers. In addition, I clearly got the message that it wasn't OK to cry, and had the affectionate, emotional side of me essentially harassed and bullied underground.

Given this, it seems only natural that I was very anxious when we sent our girls to kindergarten. I didn't want them to go to school, partly because I knew I would miss them and partly, I'm sure, because of my own feelings about school and how I felt that school cut off a large part of myself. On the other hand, I do understand what Manfred means about feeling that our children should have to tough it out, as we did. When our daughters began to dislike kindergarten, part of me (what I think of as the school-indoctrinated me) did feel like saying, "I don't care if you don't feel like going today; you have to go, because it's school!" But I was also aware that they were in pain and I wanted to be able to have the time to listen to them and try to figure out that pain.

We ended up homeschooling for one year, and then the girls chose to go back into school through third grade. They homeschooled again through sixth grade, tried junior high school for two years, and are now homeschooling again. Today they are 16 and, of course, have much more control over their lives. Yet sometimes I do still find myself thinking – about things that have nothing to do with school or academics – "You have to do this, you have to stick it out." It might be something like the intense two weeks of ballet rehearsal running up to the Nutcracker performance. If Nia gets exhausted and doesn't want to go one night, I get frustrated and want to say, "You committed to this, and you've got to do it."

Now, I recognize that sticking with something you've freely chosen to do is very different from sticking with something (like school) that you had no choice about. Yet my reactionary "gotta stick it out" response still comes, in part, I think, because so many of my previous life experiences (as a child and adult) were in situations where I felt I had no choice. It's sometimes hard for me to understand the realm my unschooling daughters inhabit, because they are more conscious about and experienced with making choices.

Nevertheless, my strongest feelings about homeschooling have been the opposite of the resistance Manfred describes in so many fathers. My most negative reactions have come at the times that Mavis and Nia decided to go back to school. I've been uneasy, afraid, and frustrated, thinking that they are giving up something that is central to themselves. But as I look back on it now, I think it's been good for them to have the choice to go in and out. They were working out their feelings about school as they entered and exited. They were figuring out, "Is this the right thing? Am I keeping up with what I'm supposed to know? Am I keeping up my friendships with people I care about? Can I still be myself in school/out of school?" and so on. In the past year-and-a-half of homeschooling, they've expressed no desire to go back to school.

Mavis (left), Joe, and Nia

In choosing to go in and out of school, and in their homeschooling lives, they certainly have more freedom than I had as a kid. So, on reflection, I'm surprised that I don't feel more resentment or jealousy of that greater freedom. But I know that others have those feelings. When I talk to other people about homeschooling, one common reaction is a kind of palpable wall of resentment and resistance – a sense of, "How dare you talk about such things? It's impossible! You are irresponsible and destroying what I hold most dear!" A father who feels that kind of resentment of a child's freedom may resent it because he didn't have it himself as a child. His child's homeschooling freedom (or potential freedom) may also bring the father face to face with the confinement of his current working and emotional life as an adult.

For me, there's a way in which my daughters' liberty from school and its constraints taught me how to be free, too, and gave me the permission to take risks I hadn't taken before. Starting *New Moon* was a big risk for us. Both Nancy (my wife) and I worked in management positions at established organizations, and were finally making decent salaries after years of living in poverty. Somehow, despite this, we took the risk of following a dream. Although it wasn't conscious at the time, I'm not sure we would have taken that risk if we hadn't been unschooling for several years. By experiencing how unschooling worked for the girls, it was possible for us to say, "We can do that too. Like the girls, we can follow our own interests and passions where they take us. We can stay home and enjoy each other's company and do something worthwhile together." And that's what we did! Just one more way unschooling has radically changed our lives. ◆

Involving Children in Adult Work

Carolyn Coman's novels for young people have been widely praised. Her first,* Tell Me Everything, *was published in 1993, and her second,* What Jamie Saw, *was published in 1995 and won a Newbery Honor Award. Carolyn's 17-year-old daughter, Anna Coman-Hidy, has been homeschooling for two years. In this interview Carolyn talks about how she has involved her daughter in her writing work over the years – not because she thought it would be a good educational experience, but because she truly valued her daughter's help. John Holt wrote that one of his chief interests was in breaking down the barriers between young people and adults and in giving young people greater access to adult work and concerns. We invite you, as you read, to reflect on ways that you can involve your children in whatever it is that you do and care about.

How old was Anna when you first began involving her in your work?

It's hard to pinpoint because when she was younger, her father and I would talk to each other about our work and there was just a constant flow of those conversations in the house. She was just raised with those conversations, and from a very early age she felt comfortable jumping in and saying what she thought.

I began to ask for Anna's opinions more deliberately when I began writing *Tell Me Everything*. She was in fourth grade when I began thinking about it and fifth grade when I really began writing it. I would talk to her about my story and my character – who was a 12-year-old girl named Roz – in much the same way that we would talk about my friends or her friends. When she talked about her friends, she might give me her impressions of how they thought or why they did what they did, which is very much the way you speak about a character in a story. So I would tell her about what was happening in my story, what the basic plot or situation was, and then I would kind of wonder aloud about what that meant for Roz, how she might respond.

That was when I really started relying on Anna, because she would give me an absolutely unedited child's response to whatever I was wondering about. She would say something that seemed to her so obvious and simple, about what something would feel like to Roz. Or I would say what I had thought and Anna would say, "Are you kidding? I would never feel that way." That was interesting, because sometimes I would take that to mean, "a child would never feel that way," and I would make a change, but sometimes I would discuss it with her and ask, "Do you think it's possible for a child who has a very different life from yours to feel this way?" I think that concept excited her, that someone could have a different life and could therefore have different kinds of feelings.

Do you remember any of the specific exchanges you had, any specific suggestions Anna made?

Here's one of the ones I especially love. When I was writing *Tell Me Everything*, I got to the point where it was clear that Roz was going to run away from where she lives, in Massachusetts, and get herself to New Jersey to seek out the boy who is central to the story (her mother died while saving his life). When I write, it's always hard for me to get all the facts and logistics worked out. I was wondering how Roz would get there and how she would come up with the money. I was stuck, so I was thinking about all these complicated answers, and I wasn't getting anywhere until I asked Anna if she would go for a walk with me and talk about it. I was telling her all my concerns and saying, "Well, she could do this, she could do that," and then Anna said, "Mom, you are really bossing her around!" Now to me, that was a quintessential child response, and yet it also revealed such an understanding of writing. There I was working so hard to figure things out so that I could decide them and make them so, and Anna was saying, "You're trying to tell this girl what to do." I don't think that she could have consciously articulated the thought, "You need to listen to her character and she'll tell you what to do," but that was what she meant. And it happened that as soon as I did that, as soon as I stopped racking my brain and simply stepped back and thought about Roz

that as soon as I did that, as soon as I stopped racking my brain and simply stepped back and thought about Roz and what she would do, it was completely clear to me: she would work to earn the money.

It's interesting that at this point you were deliberately turning to Anna for advice. It wasn't as though she just happened to be involved in your work when she overheard a conversation or something like that.

Yes, I did turn to her. By that time, I had been reading my chapters-in-progress aloud to her. I would get a chapter to a certain point – not all the way finished, but as good as I could make it at the time – and then I would ask for her feedback. When I did that with the first chapter, I simply wanted to find out, "Does this interest you, would you like to know more?" After that, I would read her each chapter. I always remember how she looked: I would sit at my desk, and she would sit next to me on a little futon couch that I had, and she would cross her legs and listen. I used to call her "Little Buddha." I'd say, "Little Buddha, I need your help, could you listen to this?" She would do it, not at all begrudgingly, although I think she realized that it was serious work. She had to concentrate to take it in and think about it, and sometimes she would say, "I'm too tired to do it now." I'd say, "OK, tell me when you're ready."

When she would respond, she would invariably say, in two sentences, exactly what I needed to hear. She would never tell me she liked something when she didn't, so when she said, "It's good," I knew that that was high praise. Sometimes she would pick out a specific line or word and say, "That's not right, that's not it yet," and she would always be dead on. She would always be basing her comments on her understanding of Roz's emotional state at the time.

Were you also showing the chapters to other people at this point?

Yes, I also had my writer's group of three other women who also read the book chapter by chapter and gave me feedback. That was wonderful, but I still turned to Anna, because she had a special perspective. Often, the responses she gave me reinforced what I was hearing from my other readers, but she also added something. When I would tell the others in my group what Anna had said, they were impressed and said that that was an element that I couldn't have gotten elsewhere.

Did you continue to ask for Anna's feedback with your next book?

I didn't read *What Jamie Saw* to her in process because that book came together in a much more disjointed way. I gave it to her only when I had a draft of the whole thing. Her reaction there was really on target, again, because she said it was really good but the last sentence was wrong for the story. Now, the funny thing was, my editor had said the same thing. He had already questioned that sentence twice, and I was trying to ignore him, thinking that he didn't understand, but when Anna said it, I had to realize that they both had a point.

With the book I'm writing now, I'm again reading it to Anna chapter by chapter, and now that she's 17, she has a more adult sensibility and has a broader range of what interests her. But she still doesn't hesitate to say what she thinks, and she hasn't lost that ability to get right to the point.

What do you think Anna gets out of the experience of helping you?

So many things. One, conversation always had an important place in our lives, and I always think about this now that we're homeschooling. Schools want to create kids who can have intelligent conversations, but they so rarely give them opportunities to practice the art of conversation, which Anna was doing all the time. And when she now talks about writing, I see that she knows an incredible amount

Anna (left) and Carolyn

I really started relying on Anna, because she would give me an absolutely unedited child's response to whatever I was wondering about.

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about the structure of a story, which she didn't learn from some dry lecture.

Anna didn't really become a reader, in the sense of choosing to read avidly, until she became a homeschooler, and now I think that the way she reads and discusses what she reads is very much grounded in what she learned from our discussions.

I know, too, that Anna's understanding of her own work is very much connected to her understanding of mine. Anna is now very passionate about acting, and I think she saw, early on, that not only was it all right to have a passion, but that in fact it was the best thing in the world to care so deeply about something. And she learned about work: about the process, the discipline, the dry times. Sometimes when she is involved with a show and going through a hard time, she'll complain about it but then she'll say, "I know this is how it has to be."

It seems to me that it's important to make clear that if one learns that, it can translate to any kind of work. I mean, people might think that a child who grew up helping her mother with her writing would inevitably grow up to be a writer, but you're saying that it doesn't have to be that direct. She grew up to understand certain things that she could use no matter what she became interested in.

Yes, I think it was very clear to her that it was translatable, that it didn't make any difference if it was writing or acting or anything else.

How does sharing your work affect your relationship with Anna?

At the deepest level, it connects us. I think to myself: here I am, connecting with my daughter about something that is of vital importance to me. It's very intimate, to share your work with someone.

And it's so rare nowadays that children have any real sense of what their parents' work is or what they care about.

You really need to hear about it on a daily level to connect with it, I think. It's not the same if you just visit one day and don't see the work or hear anything about it the rest of the time. Hearing is important, I think – the child doesn't just want to see what her parents do; she wants to know how they feel about it, too.

I wonder if some people might think that this is all very well for something as – I don't know, romantic or interesting as writing, but are there really benefits to sharing your work with your children, whatever that work is?

I think there are, because children want to know us and connect with us. When I was working as an editor at a publishing house, Anna sometimes visited and sat in on meetings, and even when the meetings were tedious, she was still interested to see what I did and how I thought about it. I think it would be fascinating for any kid to find out how their parent thinks about whatever they do, even if it's, "I hate this job, but this is why I do it," and maybe that answer will reveal the higher values that are involved, like, "I do this because I want you to be able to go to college" or "I do this so I can do something else" or "I do this because I was taught that working is important." Whatever it is, your child is learning how you think about things. And then, if you can connect with your child about stuff that's deeply important, it sets a precedent for doing that in other areas. It's true that Anna and I get along very well, and know each other very well, maybe more than a lot of mothers and teenage daughters, but we're so used to having good conversations and having a strong connection that I think we would feel shortchanged by anything less than that. Sometimes I think maybe I've made it harder for us to separate, now that Anna is 17 and will be going off on her own soon. But I don't think so. That just doesn't seem to be true. Instead, I feel really accepting of the upcoming separation because I feel like I've had this connection with her. Maybe I'm kidding myself! But I don't think so, because what I really feel is that even when she goes off to live her own life, I'm not going to lose her. ◆

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Watching Children Learn

Architecture Walks

Anne-Marie Gorman writes from Germany:

My children and I have been enjoying architecture together. It began several months ago when we were still living in the Boston area. We borrowed a board book called *Architecture Counts* from the local library. It's a toddler's counting book – one skyscraper, two dormers, three arches, etc. – which we'd picked out for Monica (1 1/2). But my 5-year-old twins, Sophie and Teresa, were excited to discover that the book's photos were all of local buildings. Thus, the skyscraper is Boston's John Hancock tower; we'd often see it on our way to errands, and it quickly became "our skyscraper," greeted with shouts of joy. The girls were inspired to go on "architecture walks," where we'd look for columns, domes, etc. on the buildings we passed.

Then, in a secondhand shop, I came across a book called *What It Feels Like to Be a Building* by Forrest Wilson (Doubleday 1969, and reprinted by Preservation Press, 1988). It uses simple text and black-and-white pictures to get you to imagine yourself feeling the stresses on a beam, a column, a buttress, and so on. This led to attempts to build some of these elements using our wooden blocks; some were easy, some were hard, and some were impossible (e.g. an arch, when all your blocks are squares or rectangles).

Since then we've moved to Cologne, Germany. We walk everywhere for our errands (whereas in the U.S. we drove most places) and the kids notice, all on their own, architectural details and, sometimes, how they are different from or similar to the ones back in Boston. The cathedral, whose spires are visible from many points in our neighborhood, has become a new Hancock Tower.

When we went to visit the cathedral, the children asked for lists of things they could look for. This expanded from architecture to religious symbolism and led to attempts to "read" the Bible stories and saints' lives illustrated in the stained glass, carvings, and paintings. The bishops' tombs and the casket containing the relics of the Three Kings contributed to the girls' faint historical sense; the former also gave rise to discussions about death and funerals, comparing the bishops' burials with their grandmother's.

Their wooden blocks were too heavy to bring to Germany, but the girls built things out of Cuisenaire Rods and discovered that you can build the same thing in different sizes. Then they started seeing which of the rods' color combinations are equivalent to each other.

I can't help but compare my children's enjoyment of a gothic cathedral (even Monica yells "Gaygo!" when she sees a gargoyle) with my boredom when my parents took my sisters and me to Europe as children. I'm glad, and grateful, that my children are different, but I can't say I'm proud, because I hardly planned any of it!

History Walks

Priscilla Young Colletto (NY) writes:

I live at Common Place Land Cooperative in Truxton, New York. Our backyard is Morgan Hill State Forest. State forests are rich in history. I first discovered this as a young teen when I began to wander out beyond our 200-acre dairy farm, exploring the unknown dimensions of the woods that lay beyond. As I discovered things, I began to map them: creeks, old roads, trails, foundations, old mill dams. Slowly my map filled in, rich in detail. Looking back on those solo hikes, I realize that the thinking I did, inspired by the natural beauty around me, the peacefulness of the woods, and the sense of freedom I felt as an explorer, helped me develop my philosophy of life and a sense of my place in the world.

Now, as an unschooling mom, I'm sharing my love and firsthand knowledge of the forest with children in the area. I began offering a variety of outings for children in the spring of 1994, when my daughter was 5. Several families on our land cooperative were interested, as were my nieces and

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nephews, homeschooling friends, and families that I had originally met as a Home Visitor for Headstart. For a rural area, we are very fortunate to have so many others homeschooling in the immediate area. On the first outings I offered, neighbors who attend school very much wanted to be involved as well, so I offered the program after school. Since then I have offered the outings during the day, with school children joining us during the summer.

Children are welcome to come on their own, or parents may join us if they are interested, as four parents were when we went on an outing to underground railroad sites. The children on the outings have ranged in age from 4 to 12 years old, and the size of the group is anywhere from 3 to 18 people. On a typical historical outing, there are four or five children with me, which works best because with a group that size, a strong team spirit is formed and everyone is able to find neat stuff and be an active participant. When we go on hiking and biking outings, we don't work as intensively as a group, so group size doesn't matter as much.

I approach the historical outings as a mystery and adventure. I draw from my memory of the forest and the discoveries I made years ago. I also study old maps that I have gotten from the County Historical Society, and I have visited with the town historian and followed up on leads she gave me. One lead was a story about a schoolhouse, somewhere along a particular road, that closed in 1871. That inspired me to title one outing, "The Mystery of the Lost Schoolhouse. Can We Find It?" I told the children what information I had found: that the school opened in 1855 and closed in 1871, that I had looked at three different maps and each one showed the school in a different location along the road. I said, "The map here shows that there was a home across the road from the school and that both were just west of Dry Brook. When the school closed, the children were told to go to another school four miles from here. That school was located on my parents' dairy farm just down the road from the house I grew up in. My dad tore that old school building down when I was a child."

On the walks, I wonder aloud about any question or hypothesis that occurs to me, and the children spontaneously do the same. As we searched for the site of the old school, I wondered, "Do you think the families who lived here when the school closed all had their children walk eight miles a day to the other school, or do you think that some might have chosen to homeschool instead?"

We didn't find any trace of the school, but at a site that one of the maps had indicated, we found a wild turkey nest with eleven eggs. Also, we did find the foundation of the house that the map we had with us indicated had been across the road from the school. We dug at that site with the trowels and shovels we always bring along, and we found lots of melted glass, which led us to wonder and ultimately to conclude that the house had burned down.

This year, Char, a friend of mine in a neighboring town, heard about our historical outings and offered to lead us to a number of historical sites on her hill: a couple of underground railroad sites, the old stagecoach inn site, circus barn foundations with the remains of a hydraulic dam system that brought water to the barns, and some house sites, one with a very nice hand-dug well.

When we find an old foundation site, we search for things by looking and digging. We have found old pottery pieces, parts of wood stoves, old bottles, lead pipes, wooden water pipes, and parts to an old hand pump. If we determine that the foundation was for a house, we look to see if there was a barn nearby, as there almost always is. We try to find the water source the family may have used, and we look at the map of 1876 that we always carry with us to see what the last name was of the family there at the time. And we wonder aloud together about what it might have been like to live at that time. For example, when we found the site of a school that, according to the booklet written by the town historian, had 18 students and a teacher who was 16 years old, we wondered about what it would have been like to be a child attending school here 145 years ago. Did they plow the roads back then? Did all the children walk to school or did some ride horses? Why was this school abandoned? What happened to the building? Can we figure it out by looking around or digging for clues? How come no one lives here anymore? Why did people move away?

Each historical outing brings up a whole series of questions like this. My approach to learning is to support each child's own curious inquiry. On the quarterly reports that I send to the local school officials, I could list our outings under history, or under physical education (hiking), or under environmental sciences (we observe the natural world as we search for clues to the past). But for our purposes, everything just naturally flows together as one experience. Here, a mixed age group, accompanied by genuinely interested adults, works together as a team to explore, to question, to learn – all while getting a healthy dose of exercise, fun, good conversation, and playful interaction.

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Volunteering at Museum; Working with Potter

Joshua and Jessica Amas (HI) wrote in response to GWS #110's Focus on collaboration between children and adults. From Joshua:

I have been volunteering at the Kauai Children's Museum for two months. I got the chance to volunteer through my parents, who were already volunteers. My sister and I first volunteered with our parents. The museum staff got to know us and they called us up to volunteer by ourselves.

The main job I had was to explain to children and adults about the exhibits. Children came with their teachers or parents and I explained the exhibits to them. I had to change my talk for every age group. One time, I helped to move the exhibits, and I got to do just as much work as the older people, even though I am 11 years old.

It was really neat working with adults side by side, because they treated me with respect and listened to my ideas. The adults counted on me to troubleshoot the computer. I was also the one who chose the CD ROMs for the day. I had to change them for different age groups and interests.

I liked working with people of all ages, and I like that I can volunteer at different events that the museum puts on. I volunteered at Earth Day and at the County Fair.

And from Jessica:

I have always liked ceramics. Lately I have been taking Raku classes at an artists' studio. Raku is a special way of firing clay using high heat. A special glaze is used. After the piece is fired, it is placed in a closed container with newspaper and sawdust. A lot of how the piece turns out depends on how long it is left in the container. Each piece turns out differently.

I take the classes with both children and adults – the age range is 8 to 70! Anyone can go. We think of our own projects and our instructor helps us if we need it. We talk and share ideas. It doesn't matter that I am just 10 years old. My instructor treats me with respect and listens to my ideas.

The first project I made was a plantation house. My instructor liked the idea so much that he got books with pictures of plantation houses. He lends us books so we can get ideas.

I helped the instructor when a high school class used his studio to Raku their pieces. My job was to get supplies ready for the firing. The teacher videotaped it and some visitors watched too.

Another thing I like about the ceramics classes is that they are held at an artists' studio and I can watch the artists at work. It is exciting when customers buy their works of art!

Reasons for Not Going

Education Otherwise, the British homeschooling group, printed in its December 1995 issue this list from 8-year-old Sophie Puttick, and said that she wrote it at 6:30 AM on a Sunday and didn't go to school on Monday. She hasn't gone since. Here's Sophie's "Reasons for Not Going to School":

1. I would like to do more subjects and work that I like for as long as I like and not have to put it away half way through.
2. I want to spell better.
3. I'm fed up being hurt at school by other people.
4. I don't want to be inside all day.
5. I want to go to the toilet without asking.
6. I want to ask more questions without being stopped and told to be quiet.
7. I need more help with things I find difficult.
8. I would like to visit museums, art galleries, swimming pools, and libraries when they are quiet so I can concentrate.
9. I want to play my recorder for longer during the day and not after school when I am tired.
10. I want to go and look at things that I think are interesting.
11. I want to do more craft, painting, cooking, gardening, sports, and reading in the day.

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Trusting the Learning Process

Naomi Aldort (WA) writes:

Yonatan, at 9, had shown no obvious interest in math. Since I never impose any learning on my children, I never sat with him or talked to him about any basic calculating skills. (I also think that beyond basic calculations, math is not a basic skill. It is a specialty skill for the study of math itself or for science or engineering, in which case a person would acquire it when he or she pursued that subject). It therefore amazed me to see Yonatan multiplying at ease in the process of life itself. He never learned multiplication tables, but when he was trying to figure out how many crayons he had in five equal boxes, he multiplied accurately. And, when a box of cookies was placed on the table, he multiplied the rows and then divided that number by the number of children present. He told us how many cookies each child would get. Other than those rare occasions, I don't remember him talking about numbers at all.

Likewise, at 5, Yonatan's brother Lennon put his hands on a pile of change. He had never handled money before that time. After organizing the money into look-alike piles, he asked me to give him five dollars in exchange for most of the coins. In counting, I found his exchange to be accurate. How he figured it out I have no idea. The brain keeps working and evolving regardless of lessons; it even evolves better without them.

Lennon does everything in four-month increments. At age 3 1/2, he played the piano for four months and left us spellbound by his talent and then puzzled by his loss of interest in music. When I told my musician brother about this, he commented, "Four months is long enough to produce a CD." Lennon went through four months of science, four months of numbers, four months of puzzles, of dancing, of biking. A year and a half later, at age 5 1/2, he came back to the piano – for four months! Can I trust? Can I respect the process? Could he somehow be preparing for piano while riding his bike? Should I respect his self-knowing process? Do I have a choice? Do I even know what is best for Lennon, or what he would become? Is becoming a musician his destiny? If it is, nothing will stop him, but if it isn't, my intervention may divert him from something else he is growing to become. So I stay curious and trusting. I remind myself of Mary Haskell's words to Kahlil Gibran, "Nothing you become will disappoint me; I have no preconception that I'd like to see you be or do. I have no desire to foresee you, only to discover you."

Another lesson I have learned is that we never know what a child is really learning and so intervening may actually impede a learning process that we do not understand. Lisa's parents (friends of ours) were concerned that Lisa, at 9, was wasting her summer doing nothing productive. She was running around the house, and biking, every day, all day long. When, later in the fall, she explained to her parents relativity in terms of speed and motion, they had a glimpse into just one aspect of learning that took place that summer. For all I know, Lisa may have been learning to read on that bike. Spinning those wheels spun her brain where it needed to be. Her parents' trust protected her inner flow. Within a short time that fall, Lisa mastered reading. The connection between biking and reading may sound absurd and is clearly impossible to prove, but the point is that we don't really know. I have been amazed more than once to discover that one activity leads to the mastering of another seemingly unrelated skill. You think your child is making towers of mud and getting messy, while he is learning about measurements and numbers. You are sure that she is just playing with your scarves, as she is acquiring important scientific information and is learning to blend colors. Some correlations seem obvious; others puzzle me forever.

I always knew that reading comes from being read to. Well, Lennon was never interested in stories. He loved to sit in my lap when I played the piano for him, but books had no charm for him. Yet he taught himself to read. How did he do it without books? Through dancing. He danced for

hours to the music of the musical "Oliver." Then he danced and sang until he knew the words of a few songs. Then he sat by the piano with the sheet music, and with his finger he followed the syllables of the lyrics while singing them.

Did he consciously design this method? Who knows, and what difference does it make? All that is useful to see here is that although dancing and singing are also valuable in themselves, another skill was also mastered that could not have been predicted.

Yet another angle on learning and trust is that learning itself has no physical manifestation whatsoever. More than once, parents of teenagers share with me their worry about their children who seem to do nothing. But silence and contemplation are the home of thinking, creating, and growing. The brain is never on a break. Learning does not look a certain way. It certainly does not look like school's idea of it – workbooks, notebooks, desks, and sitting. But what does it look like? When the miracle of learning occurs in front of our eyes but we cannot see it, what else can we do but respect and trust?

I've also observed that children's play is the best device they have for learning everything from social behavior to caring, empathy, emotional maturity, and actual knowledge and skills. So many parents and teachers are concerned when a day goes by with play and play and more play. But is play really a waste of time? Did nature goof when all cubs, including humans, were born with a drive and an ability to play?

One day, Yonatan and Lennon took covers of pots from the kitchen and twirled them in such a way that they spun like tops on the floor. Then they filled the covers with colorful items and witnessed a variety of shape and color changes as the covers spun. In their twirling play, they created combinations by changing shapes and colors, observed results and then changed things accordingly to create different results. The two young scientists were initiating, communicating, acting, and observing the laws of the universe.

I call these types of activities scientific play, or learning the nature of a phenomenon. Children will make a lab of reality out of every space. Even though they don't always put what they have learned into words or equations, they do learn. Naming things isn't the discovery – it's grasping the phenomenon itself that matters.

Children also "rehearse" life through pretend play. Playing is a way to assimilate reality, alleviate fears, and try it all out. A parent complained to me once that her children kept pretending their house was on fire. They were running through the house with scarves as flames, alerting everyone to the danger and then quenching it with great noise and satisfaction. Living in the country, this family uses wood for heat and they teach their children to stay away from the fire. The children are rehearsing, drilling themselves in the worst case scenario and alleviating their fear by gaining experience.

One of the most striking qualities of children's play, to me, is the many rules they form and how strict they are about them. I recall a group of about a dozen children, mixed ages 4-10, jumping on one big trampoline. Within minutes it was obvious to the children that it was too crowded to be fun. Very quickly they came up with a rule: three at a time. A couple of them started chanting, "Three at a time." Others joined the chant and then sat down, letting three at a time enjoy the jump. Rules pass from generation to generation or are created as needed, and children keep the rules and learn social grace, discipline, and limits. ◆

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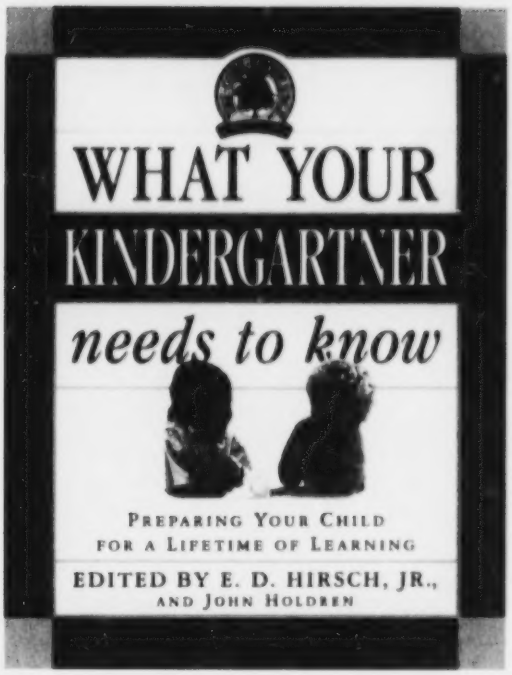

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Additions to Directory

Here are the additions and changes that have come in since our last issue. Our complete 1996 Directory was published in GWS #108. Our Directory is not a list of all subscribers, but only of those *who ask to be listed*, so that other GWS readers, or other interested people, may get in touch with them. If you would like to be included, please send the entry form or a 3x5 card (one family per card). Please take care to include all the information - last name, full address, and so on. Tell us if you would rather have your phone number and town listed instead of your mailing address (we don't have space to list both).

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MN — Sheryl & Gary CHAPIN (Parker/92, Brigid & Emma/93) 3215 Valley Ridge Dr, Eagan 55121

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Que — Libby & Pierre MITCHELL (Lucy/79, Anna/84) 33 Av Perrault #14, St Anne De Bellevue H9X 2E1 **(H)**

Other Locations — Debbie & Francis DESMOULIN (Stephane/85, Alizee/88) 17, rue de l'Abbaye, 77860 St Germain Sur Morin, **France** (change) ••• Anne-Marie & Michael GORMAN (Sophie & Teresa/91, Monica/94) Venloerstr.1-3, 50672 Köln **Germany** (change) ••• Sonja & Stefan WERLE (Jonathan/95) Bleiweisstr. 36a, 60599 Frankfurt, **Germany**

Groups to Add to the Directory of Organizations (complete Directory was published in GWS #108):

IN — Families Learning Together, c/o Jill Whelan, 1714 E 51 St, Indianapolis 46205, 317-255-9298

MI — Families Learning and Schooling at Home (FLASH), 21671 B Drive N, Marshall 45068, 616-781-1069 ••• Home Educators' Circle, 1280 S John Hix, Westland 48186, 313-326-5406

MS — Oxford Homeschool Network, 21 CR 3024, Oxford 38655

Corresp. Schools — School for Young Performers, 2472 Broadway Suite 312, New York NY 10025, 1-800-390-5899 (K-12; students can enroll for one course or the full program)

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ENTRY FORM FOR DIRECTORY

Use this form to send us a new entry or a substantial address change to be run in the next available issue of GWS.
Adults (first *and* last names):

Organization (only if address is same as family):

Children (names/birthyears):

Full address (Street, City, State, Zip):

Are you willing to host traveling GWS readers who make advance arrangements in writing? Yes ___ No ___

Are you in the 1996 Directory (GWS #108)? Yes ___ No ___
Or in the additions in a subsequent issue? Yes ___ No ___

Address Changes:

OH — Assoc of Ohio Homeschoolers, 3636 Paris Blvd, Westerville 43081

OK — HERO of OK, c/o Leslie Moyer, 4401 Quail Run Av, Skiatook 74070-4024; 918-396-0108 and HERO Resource Center, c/o Lucy Clark, 916 82 Av, Norman 73071

VA — Blue Ridge Area Network for Congenial Homeschooling, c/o Amy Birdwell, 255 Ipswich Pl, Charlottesville 22901

National/General — Jewish Home Educator's Network, c/o M. Lowe, 1295 Marshall Dr SE, Salem OR 97302; 503-362-1203; email marilyn.lowe@chemek.com

Pen-Pals

Children wanting pen-pals should write to those listed. Please try to write to someone on the list before listing yourself, and remember to put your address on your letter. To be listed here, send name, age, address, and 1-3 words on interests. ••• Corinn WALTERS (11) RR 1 Box 309, Farmington NH 03835; reading, writing, acting ••• Winston LOWE (6) 1421 Salty Bottom Rd, Gurley AL 35748; electronics, robots, alternative energy ••• Charity ZETTL (13) 2883 Killarney Dr, Prince George BC V2K 3J5, Canada; hockey, cars, Star Wars ••• Daren RAPOPORT (15) PO Box 8304, Universal City CA 91618; Rastafarianism, reading, writing ••• Sue Ellen POFF (12) 5848 Howe Rd, Trenton OH 45067; swimming, gymnastics, drawing ••• Jason FARREN (13) 8708 Seiler Rd, New Haven IN 46774; hocky, BMX, bicycling ••• BLAKE, 4004 Doefield Dr, Manchester MD 21102. Amanda (11) reading, science, sports. Robert (11) baseball, science, cartoons

Writing to GWS

Please: (1) Put separate items of business (book orders, directory entries, letters to GWS, etc.) on separate pieces of paper. This helps us get them to the right people more quickly. (2) Put your name and address at the top of each letter.

How to write letters for publication in GWS:

1. Handwrite, type, or dictate your thoughts and send them in on paper, on a cassette tape, or on a 3.5" disc that can be read by a Macintosh (send the hard copy too).

2. There is no #2! We have no formal submission procedures, so rule #1 is all you need. Do tell us whether it's OK to use your name with the story (it's fine to be anonymous instead) and do bear in mind that we edit letters for space and clarity and that we often have much more great stuff than room to print it in a given issue, so it can take a while before something gets in.

The best way to get a sense of what kind of writing gets published in GWS is to look through a few issues. In general, we prefer writing that is in the first- or third-person ("I did this" or "She did that") rather than in the instructional or prescriptive second-person ("You should do this..."). We like to hear about what people did or tried, what did or didn't work, what they've observed or concluded or wondered as a result. GWS stories focus on how children learn, particularly how they learn outside of school settings, and how adults learn, particularly how they tried something new, figured something out, or made their way without school credentials. We are always interested in stories about how homeschoolers meet and deal with common issues – negotiating with a school district, pursuing a particular interest, learning to trust oneself – to name just a few.

We're always interested in responses to writing that has been published in the past, and GWS is often an ongoing conversation among its readers. Because there isn't much time between the day you get an issue of the magazine and the day the next issue goes to press, responses can't always be run right away, but we do try.

Most of the time, readers don't need a special invitation to write to GWS; just follow rule #1, above. When we are planning to have a section of an issue focus on a specific topic or question, we write or call people ahead of time inviting them to write on that topic. These are readers whom we suspect (based on previous correspondence) have experience with the subject or something to say on the topic. The more we hear from you, the more likely we are to know what you might be able to write about and thus the more likely we are to think of you when a particular topic comes up. For our regular Focus section, we ask kids who have written in the past, kids who have said they would like to write, and – mostly – kids chosen at random from the Directory and pen-pal listings. If you want to be asked to write for an upcoming Focus, drop us a card, or, better yet, write a GWS story about something else (your thoughts or experiences, your response to something in a previous issue).

We love hearing from readers whether or not we are able to publish the story, as all letters give us valuable information and food for thought.

Subscriptions & Renewals

Subscriptions start with the next issue published. Our current rates are $25 for 6 issues, $45 for 12 issues, $60 for 18 issues. GWS is published every other month. A single issue costs $6.

Rates for Can**adian** subscribers: $28/yr.
Outside of North America: $40/yr airmail, $28/yr surface mail (allow 2-3 months). Subscribers in U.S. territories pay U.S. rates.

Foreign payments must be either money orders in US funds or checks drawn on US banks. We can't afford to accept personal checks from Canadian accounts, even if they have "US funds" written on them. We suggest that foreign subscribers use MasterCard or Visa if possible.

Address Changes: If you're moving, let us know your new address as soon as possible. Please enclose a recent label (or copy of one). Issues missed because of a change of address (that we weren't notified about) may be replaced for $3 each. The post office destroys your missed issues and charges us a notification fee, so we can't afford to replace them without charge.

Renewals: At the bottom of the next page is a form you can use to renew your subscription. Please help us by renewing early.

How can you tell when your subscription expires? Look at this sample label:

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The number that is underlined in the example tells the date of the final issue for the subscription. The Smiths' sub expires with our 12/1/96 issue (#114, the next issue, which will say Jan./Feb. 1997 on the cover). But if we were to receive their renewal before the end of the previous month (11/30), they would qualify for the free bonus issue.

Reward for bringing in new subscribers: If you convince someone to become a new subscriber - to take out a subscription at $25 a year - you will receive a $5 credit which you can apply to any John Holt's Book and Music Store order or to your own subscription renewal. **This offer does not apply to gift subscriptions or renewals.**

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Rates: 70¢/word, $1/word boldface. Please tell these folks you saw the ad in GWS.

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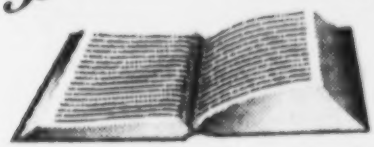
Book Reviews



*The Innovators in Education series, which brings back into print previously out of print education classics, could be subtitled "Books that John Holt loved and considered important." "*The Naked Children *and* Uptaught *were certainly among his favorite books. Now that they're available again, we hope many of you will discover them for yourselves.*

To spark your interest, here are excerpts from the forewords I wrote for each book. — Susannah Sheffer

The Naked Children by Daniel Fader
#3356 $14.95 + $3.50 s/h

... In 1965, Fader arrived at an inner-city junior high school planning to spend the year supervising an experimental program called "English in Every Classroom." This book is an account of that experiment, but it is really an account of Fader's friendship with five students. Fader realized right away that these students had something to teach him, and because of his gift of insight and his storytelling ability, we too can learn what he learned and, like Fader, be forever changed by the experience. ...

There is Wentworth, for example, classified as illiterate, hiding his magazine under his desk so the teacher won't discover he can read. Wentworth, says Fader, "chose feigned illiteracy as his protection against the indignities of school," and if we could truly understand that choice and how schooling forced it on Wentworth, we might be on our way to figuring out how to make such a choice unnecessary for other kids. But here is Wentworth again, this time in a room full of paperback books where he is told he can choose any he wants. This "illiterate" child fills his carton with books ...

The school's reading program doesn't serve Wentworth, but a huge supply of books about things he cares about does. Adults can't reach a troubled boy named Sis, but Cleo and Wentworth do. This book offers us a precarious balance of hope and despair, but I believe there's enough in it to tip the scales on the side of hope. ...

Uptaught by Ken Macrorie
#3358 $14.95 + $3.50 s/h

I can't read *Uptaught* for very long without wanting to put it down and go write something, which is, to me, a sure-fire sign of a good book about writing. Ken Macrorie's passionate crusade against "Engfish" – "the bloated, pretentious language" that he saw everywhere in student papers and in the writing of his colleagues – and his devotion to strong, clear, natural writing always inspire me. The excerpts from student writing that he quotes are so vivid and so thick with the texture of daily life and feelings that they always make me want to go write stories of my own.

What's most striking about Ken Macrorie, though, is that he is a professor who is willing to open up his classroom to all of us. Courageously – for it does take courage to do this – he lets us see his own mistakes, even failures, and his struggle to break out of the old mold into something newer, freer, better. Few teachers speak so honestly, and few are as willing as Macrorie was to challenge what they have previously believed about students and about teaching. Yet I cannot think of anything more crucial to educational reform. What will be the catalyst for change if not teachers like Macrorie, willing to question the orthodoxy and *find out*, through their own trial and error, what might work better?

... The poet Denise Levertov wrote of "the secret writers share," and she was referring to the *joy* of writing. For too long teachers have kept this secret well hidden from students, perhaps because they themselves never knew it either. So they teach only rules, and leave students feeling that the world is divided by a huge wall with all the real writers on one side and the students on the other. ...

●

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